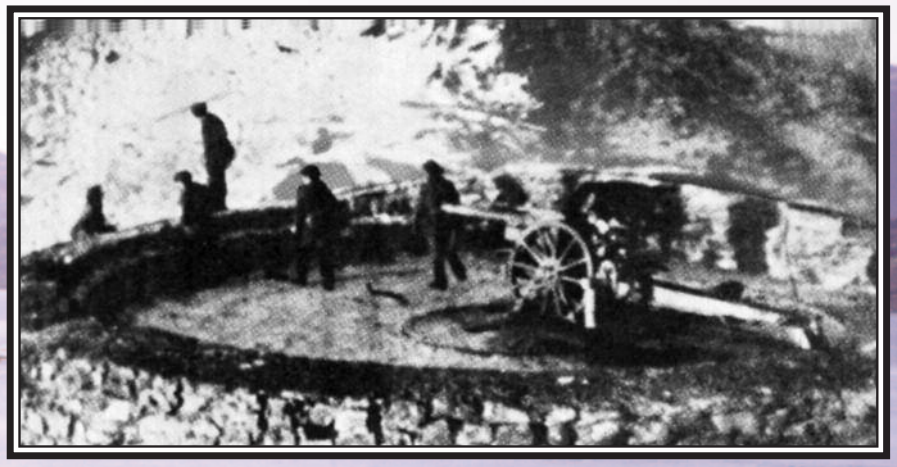
AFTER THE BATTLE



THE RAID ON VAAGSO

Number 109

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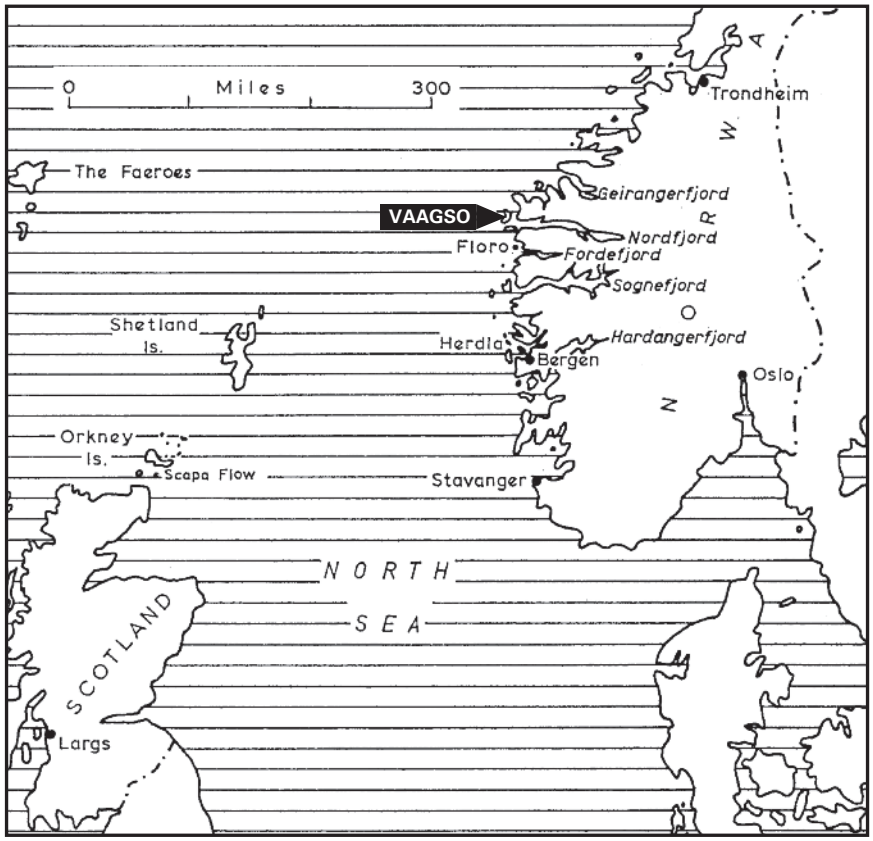
Front cover: The empty gun-pits are all that remain of the German four-gun coastal battery on the islet of Maaloy in Norway, one of the targets of the British commando raid on Vaagso of December 27, 1941. (Karel Margry) *Inset:* Commandos swarming around one of the guns shortly after its capture.

Centre Pages: From France . . . to Canada. The Canadian Unknown Soldier begins his journey from Cabaret-Rouge Cemetery, where he had lain for 80 years, to his final resting place in front of the National War Memorial in Ottawa. (Ed Storey)

Back cover: From 1942 to 1946, the island of Bora Bora in the South Pacific served as a US base on the line of communication between Australia and the United States, an airfield being built on the adjacent island of Motu Mute. This is how it looks from the air today — compare with the picture on page 46. (Color Impressions)

Acknowledgements: The Vaagso story is based on the account in *Combined Operations. The Official Story of the Commandos* by Hilary St George Saunders (The Macmillan Company, 1943).

Photo Credits: IWM — Imperial War Museum, London; USNA — US National Archives.



On December 27, 1941, British commandos carried out a raid on the coast of Norway, landing on two small adjacent islands — Vaagso and Maaloy — located about halfway between Trondheim and Bergen. The prime aim of the operation was to demonstrate that Britain was still capable of offensive action, tactical objectives being to destroy a German coastal battery on Maaloy, kill as many Germans as possible, demolish the main fish factories, wharves and a German radio station in Vaagso, seize whatever documents came to hand, arrest a few known collaborators, and then withdraw. The operation, code-named 'Archery', was carried out by No. 3 Commando, reinforced with two troops from No. 2 Commando, detachments from Nos. 4 and 6 Commando, and a party of some 20 Free Norwegian soldiers — a total force of 576 men.

The 'Archery' force sailed from Scapa Flow at 2115 hours on Christmas Eve 1941. Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the newly-appointed Director of Combined Operations, paid a last-minute visit to the commando force at Scapa Flow just prior to their departure. Here he is seen inspecting men of No. 3 Commando aboard one of the two transports. Behind him is one of the troop commanders, with Lieutenant-Colonel John Durnford-Slater, the CO of No. 3 Commando, on the left. Speaking to the assembled commandos, Mountbatten recalled how, when his own ship, the destroyer *Kelly*, went down off Crete earlier that year, the Germans had machine-gunned the survivors in the water. 'There is absolutely no need to treat them gently on my account', he concluded. 'Good luck to all of you.' (IWM)

Dawn on Maaloy. The commandos rush ashore and start up the rocks under cover of smoke flares dropped by Hampden bombers of No. 50 Squadron. This picture is actually a film still. Accompanying the commando force was a relatively strong Press section of six men: photographer Lieutenant Bill Malindine of the fledgling Army Film and Photo Unit, cine cameramen Harry Watt, Harry Rignold and Roy Boulting of the Crown Film Unit and Jack Ramsden from Movietone, and war correspondent Ralph Walling of Reuters. During the six-hour action, Malindine exposed 63 frames and the four cameramen shot off some 6,000 feet of film. The success of the operation, which was fully exploited to raise British morale, produced such a demand for picture material that many cine frames were released as stills. This dramatic shot is one of them. (IWM)

THE RAID ON VAAGSO

By Hilary St George Sanders

On October 27, 1941, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes was succeeded as Director of Combined Operations by Captain the Lord Louis Mountbatten, who was promoted Commodore First Class, and on March 18, 1942, Acting Vice-Admiral, when his title was changed to Chief of Combined Operations. At the same time, he was granted honourary commissions in the army as a Lieutenant-General and in the Royal Air Force as an Air Marshal. He at once set about planning a raid on a part of the occupied coast of Europe where, it was hoped, the enemy would least expect to be attacked. The country chosen was Norway, the place Vaagso, some hundreds of miles south of the Lofoten Islands so successfully visited in the previous March.

The object of the raid — code-named Operation 'Archery' — was, while harassing the German defences on the coast of south-west Norway, to attack and destroy a number of military and economic targets in the town of South Vaagso and on the nearby island of Maaloy, and to capture or sink any shipping found in Ulvesund. Ulvesund is the name borne by the strip of water on which the port of Vaagso lies and which divides the island of that name from the mainland. It forms part of the Indreled, that narrow passage which stretches along so much of the coast of Norway and is in the nature of a more or less continuous channel bounded by a chain of islands on the one hand and the mainland of Norway on the other. Through the Indreled passes most of the coastwise traffic, for, by so doing, ships can use the protection afforded by the chain of islands. At certain points the Indreled is broken, and one of these is situated at the north end of Ulvesund at a point where it joins a wide bay. Ships sailing northward must cross this bay and double the peninsula of Stadlandet, to the south of which lies the island of Vaagso.

Right: **Lowering stores into one of the landing craft. The men on the gang-plank are passing a demolition block, and already in the boat is an ammunition handcart. (IWM)**

Main targets of the raid were the fishing town of South Vaagso on Vaagso island, and the nearby tiny islet of Maaloy at the entrance to Ulvesund sound.

They tend, therefore, to congregate in Ulvesund, where they remain awaiting a suitable moment to pass into the open sea round the end of Stadlandet, which is noted for its storms, and then northwards once more under the cover of the numerous islands. Running roughly at right angles to Ulvesund is Vaagsfjord; where the two stretches of water meet, there is a small island named Maaloy, opposite which is the town of South Vaagso.

The Germans had not forgotten to fortify the southern end of Ulvesund, and they had established coastal defences on the island of Maaloy itself, as well as in and near the town of South Vaagso opposite. On Maaloy, a battery of field guns had been mounted, and there were also anti-aircraft batteries and machine guns; while four miles to the south-east was a battery of fairly heavy guns, possibly of French origin, situated on the island of Rugsundo; they were laid so as to fire westward down Vaagsfjord. Both Maaloy Island and South Vaagso were garrisoned by German troops, and it so happened that those in the town had been reinforced a few days before the attack by a detachment sent there to spend Christmas.

It was decided to approach the town and island up Vaagsfjord, the entrance of which is marked by two lighthouses at Hovdeneset and Bergsholmane. On reaching the small bay behind Halnoesvik Point, south of the little village of Hollevik, a short distance from South Vaagso, the landing craft from the assault ships were to be lowered and landings made first under cover of a naval bombardment and then of smoke laid by aircraft. Once ashore, the island of Maaloy and the town of South Vaagso were to be captured and anything of value to the enemy, such as fish-oil factories, destroyed.

After carrying out a number of rehearsals, the force — consisting of the six-inch cruiser HMS *Kenya;* part of the 17th Destroyer Flotilla, made up of HMS *Onslow, Oribi, Offa* and *Chiddingfold;* and the two infantry assault ships HMS *Prince Charles* and *Prince Leopold* — sailed from Scapa Flow on Christmas Eve, arriving at an anchorage in Sullomvoe on Christmas Day. Very heavy weather was met with in the neighbourhood of the Shetland Islands. During the passage the secretary to the captain of one of the infantry landing ships invited his commanding officer to the cabin and showed him a table moving rhythmically up and down the wall, a distance of some six inches. It was eventually discovered that this levitation was due to the heavy seas, which were literally squeezing the sides of the ship. The infantry landing ships suffered some damage. This was repaired in Sullomvoe but since the weather did not immediately abate, it was decided to postpone the operation for 24 hours. The men were, therefore, able to eat their Christmas dinner in comfort.

The weather having improved, the force sailed at 4 p.m. on Boxing Day with the promise of still further improvement. Nor was the promise belied; the storm died down, and by the time the Norwegian coast was reached, weather conditions were perfect. The ships moving across the North Sea out of the sunset into the darkness of the long winter night were a fine sight. On either side of the main formation destroyers kept guard, altering speed and course constantly. In the van was HMS *Kenya*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Harold Burrough, and in line astern behind him came the infantry landing ships. While it was still dark, landfall was made exactly at the estimated position and time. 'We approached from the west into the promise of dawn', wrote Major Robert Henriques (the well-known author) who was serving as brigade major of the Special Service Brigade and was on the bridge of the *Kenya.* 'It was a very eerie sensation entering the fjord in absolute silence and very slowly. I wondered what was going to happen for it seemed that the ship had lost her proper element, that she was no longer a free ship at sea. Occasionally I saw a little hut with a light burning in it and I wondered whether that light would be suddenly switched off, which would mean that the enemy had spotted us, or whether it would continue to burn as some Norwegian fisherman got out of bed, stretched himself and went off to his nets.'

Another standing beside him had much the same experience. 'We lay down to sleep at the end of a rough evening with the ship moving uncomfortably and the wind noisy. When we woke up it was very still, and we went on deck with the usual holiday expectations of finding that overnight the scene had changed, that we had come to a new land to enjoy a promised excitement. The wind had gone; the sea was quiet — everything was completely quiet — there was a fine moon in a clear sky and, ahead, the first suggestion of morning twilight. The other ships were neatly in line astern, and the whole force appeared to be shut in by high, steep, snow-covered mountains. A long way above us, a window shone out brilliantly, the lovely sight of a lit window hung in the darkness; this was peace again.

'It was most disturbing that there was so little left to do because everything had been done beforehand. We noted the time, exactly one minute late, that the landing craft were lowered and could just be seen through glasses, black beetles crawling in the shadow of the mountains up the black waters of the fjord. We heard our aircraft overhead and saw their welcome of heavy, familiar tracer fire rising quite slowly from the surrounding slopes. Our ship was moving very quietly towards the headland where we should come into sight of the battery, which ought by now to be expecting our arrival. As we nosed round the point, everyone was waiting for the order to "open the line of fire", and get in first with a salvo. It should have been a thrilling moment; but all the same, it was difficult to look at anything except that nostalgic window, now high astern of us, still lit and still shining brightly in the dark morning.'

The naval bombardment opened up at 8.48 a.m., the *Kenya* firing a salvo of star shell which lit up the island of Maaloy, showing not only the target to the naval gunners, but also the place where they were to drop their smoke bombs to the crews of the Hampdens. This salvo was followed by further salvos of six-inch shells. Two minutes later, the destroyers joined in the bombardment which lasted nine and a quarter minutes. During that brief period, between 400 and 500 six-inch shells fell upon a space not more than 250 yards square.

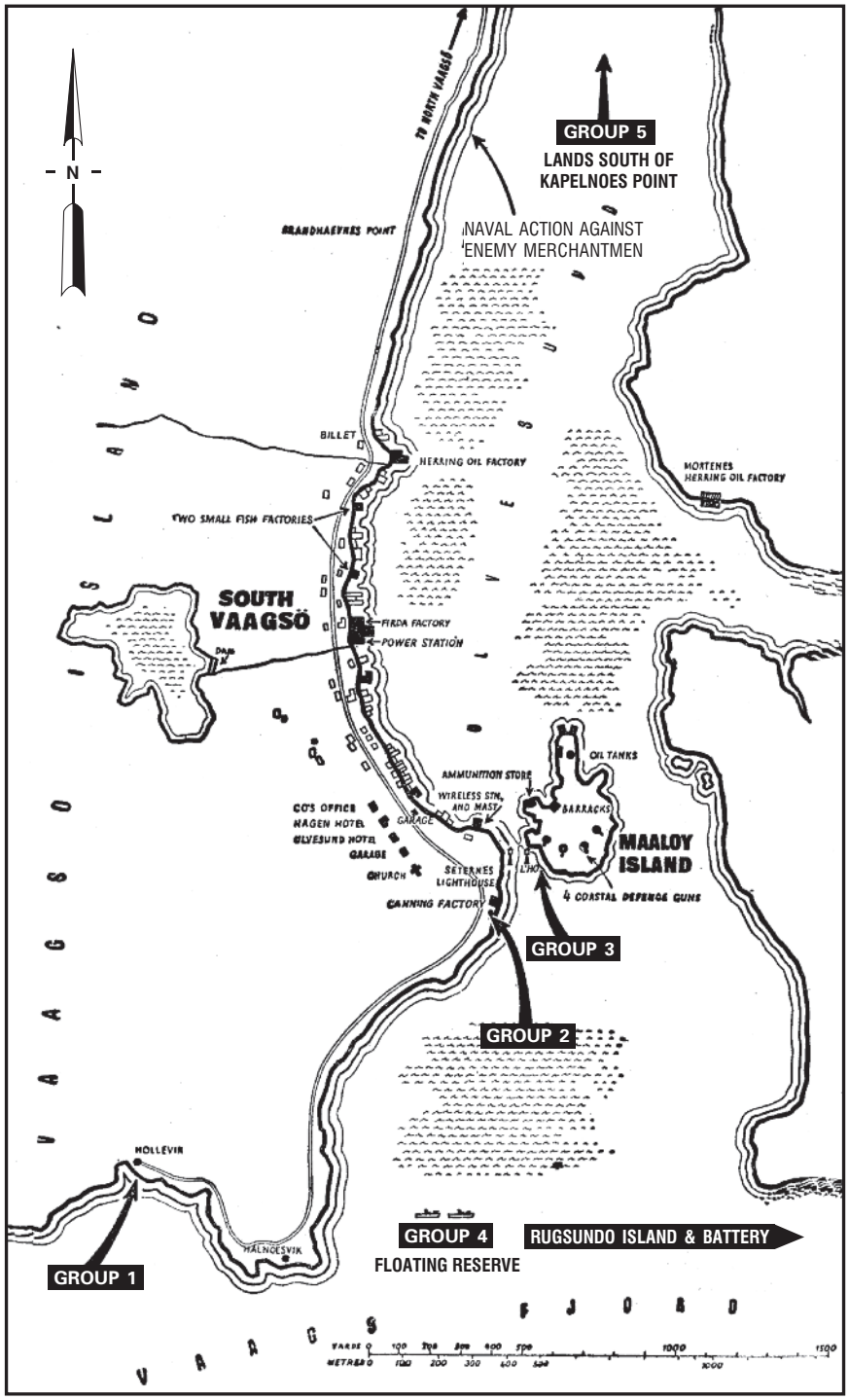
The Germans on the island had been caught unprepared. They were following their usual routine: the gunners were being roused by a loud-voiced NCO; the officer commanding, Hauptmann Butziger, was shaving; his batman, whose turn it was that morning to man the telephone connecting headquarters with the look-out post, was cleaning his officer's boots on the table beside the instrument. So busily engaged was he upon this task that he allowed the telephone bell to ring, and did not trouble to pick up the receiver. The German gunners thus received no warning. Outside the barracks on the island of Maaloy, there was a naval signalling station established on its highest point. The signaller on duty received a message flashed by lamp telling of the advent of our forces. He ran down to the small bay on the north side of the island,

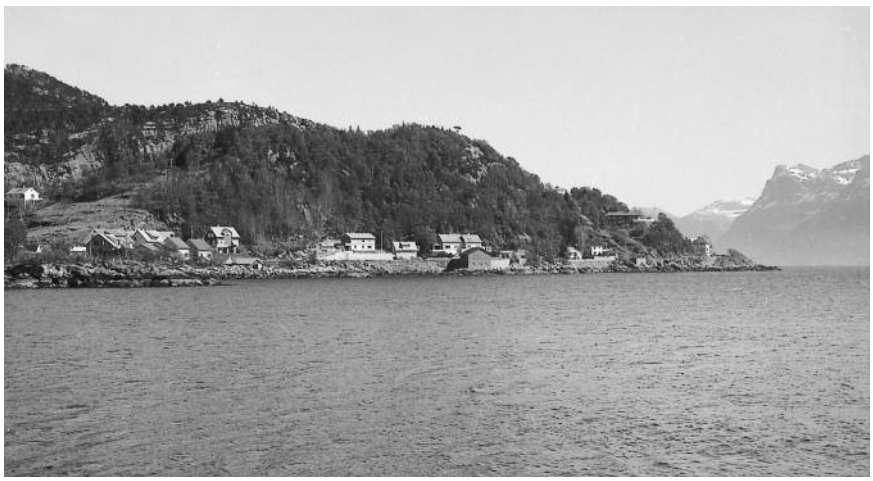
The commando force was divided into five assault groups: Group 1 was to land at Hollevik, Group 2 at South Vaagso, Group 3 on Maaloy, Group 4 was floating reserve, and group 5 was to go ashore in the area of Kapelnoes Point near Rodberg. Geographical locations in the Vaagso operation are sometimes confusing as they bear a different name in each nation's records. What the British call Vaagso is Vågsøy to the Norwegians. The fishing town on the island is South Vaagso to the British, Sør-Vågsøy on Norwegian maps, and Måløy to the Norwegians and the Germans. The tiny island just off the town is Maaloy in British accounts, but Måloya (or Moldöy or Lille-Måløen) to the Norwegians, while the Germans called it Kulen. Rodeberg is spelt Raudeberg in Norwegian.

leapt into a boat and rowed as fast as he could to the headquarters of the German Naval commandant on the main island of Vaagso. Here he delivered the warning, but when asked whether he had warned the army gunners on Maaloy he replied, 'Oh, no Sir, it is a military battery, and this is a naval signal.' The Germans are a methodical people.

The landing craft carried all of No. 3 Commando and two troops (less one section) of No. 2 Commando, a detachment of Royal Engineers from No. 6 Commando, some men of the Royal Army Medical Corps from No. 4 Commando, Operational Headquarters of the Brigade Signalling Section, a number of officers from a War Office intelligence department, and a Press unit of correspondents and photographers. With these British troops was a detachment of the Royal Norwegian Army. To this body of men, made up of 51 officers and 525 other ranks, five general tasks had been entrusted. For their fulfilment they were divided into five groups. Group 1 was to land near the village of Hollevik, on the southern shore of the island of Vaagso and a short distance from the town of South Vaagso. They were to clear the area and then move along the coast road and remain as a reserve to Group 2. Group 2 was to attack the town of South Vaagso itself and destroy a number of military and economic objectives, including the canning factory, the power station, the Firda fish-oil factory, and the herring-oil factory. Group 3 was to capture Maaloy Island. Group 4 remained in its landing craft as a floating reserve to be used by Brigadier Charles Haydon, the Military Force Commander, when he thought fit. Group 5 was to be carried on board the destroyer *Oribi* up Ulvesund and landed between the towns of South and North Vaagso to cut communications between them. To assist in the landings, the submarine HMS *Tuna* was to act as a navigational beacon off Vaagso Island.

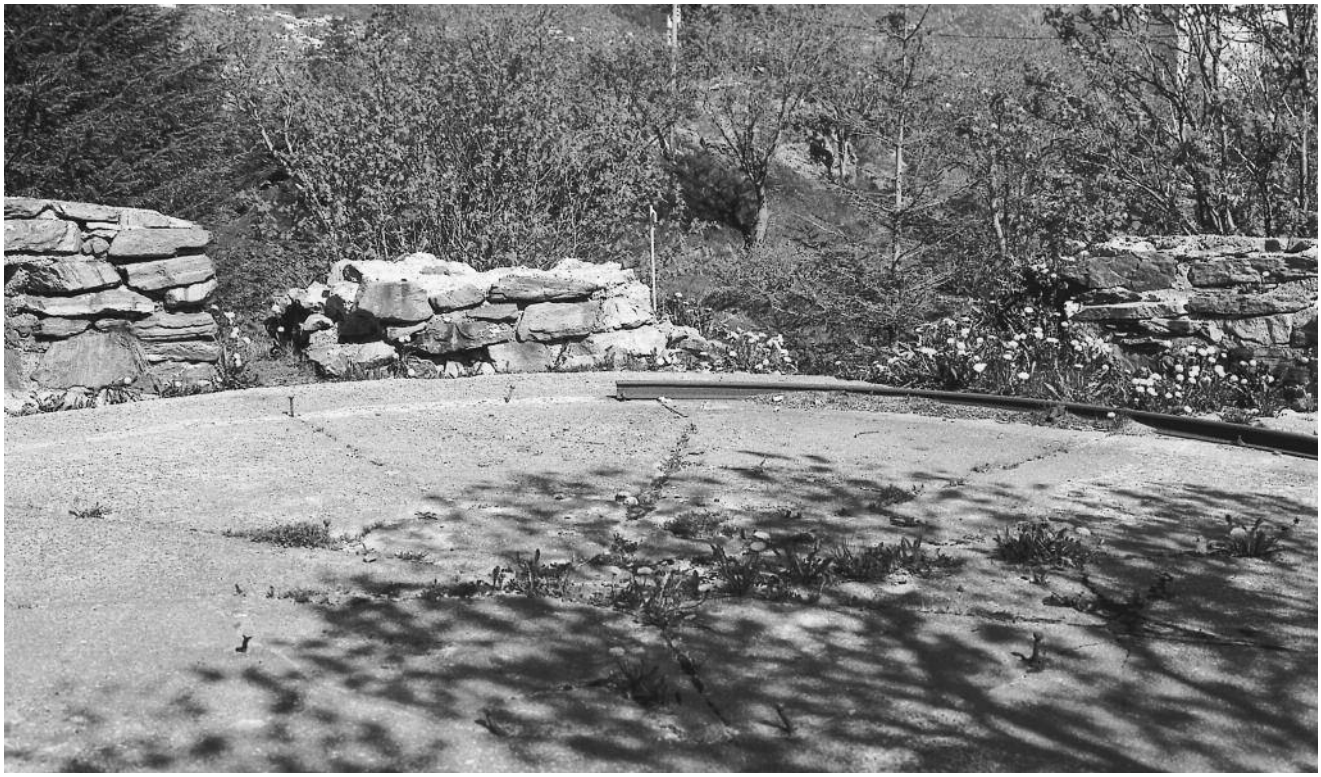
Group 1 (consisting of No. 2 Troop of No. 3 Commando under Lieutenant Bob Clement) soon accomplished its task. It cleared the area round Hollevik, captured the village of Halnoesvik, and was ordered to act as reserve to Lieutenant-Colonel John Durnford-Slater who, with Group 2, was attacking South Vaagso.



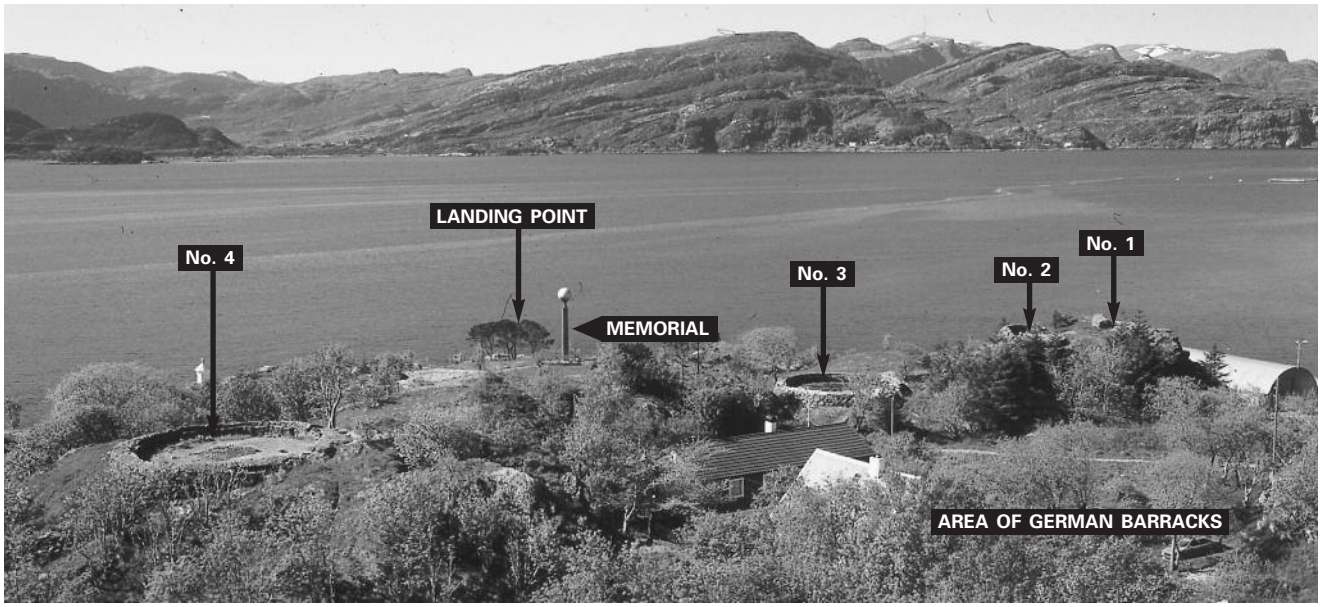


Right: **Group 1, consisting of No. 2 Troop of No. 3 Commando plus four of the Free Norwegian soldiers, came ashore at the village of Hollevik (Holvika), about two kilometres south-west of Vaagso town, to take out a German field gun which intelligence suspected on the hill directly behind the village. When the two boatloads of troops under Lieutenant Bob Clement got ashore they found the supposed gun position unoccupied, so they quickly marched down the coastal road to join the fighting in South Vaagso. The town lies just behind the headland on the right.**

Group 3, comprising Nos. 5 and 6 Troops of No. 3 Commando, assaulted the small island of Maaloy, where there was a German coastal battery of four 75mm guns. Here, Major Jack Churchill, second-in-command of No. 3 Commando and commander of Group 3, leans back on his sword while he inspects one of the guns immediately after their capture. One of the most eccentric and legendary commando characters, 'Mad Jack' Churchill never went into battle without his broadhilted Claymore sword. Originally of the Manchester Regiment, he had won a Military Cross at Dunkirk, during which campaign he carried around a longbow with which he had sworn himself to bag a German. Fond of playing on the bagpipes, during the final run-in to Maaloy, he stood fully exposed in the front of the landing craft playing *The March of the Cameron Men*, after which he charged ashore ahead of everyone brandishing his sword. Later in the war, at Salerno in September 1943, he would win a DSO by capturing over 30 Germans in a single night, stalking them individually and in pairs in the darkness, then leaping out of the shadows with a cry of 'Hände hoch!' while waving his sword wildly over their heads. He was finally captured in June 1944 during a raid on the Yugoslav island of Brac. (IWM)



Careful comparison of the stonework of the low wall surrounding the gun-pit shows that this is gun No. 3, one of those captured by No. 6 Troop under Captain Peter Young. The bolts and circular rail of the turn-table remain in the concrete floor.



This picture — taken from the road bridge which today rises high above Maaloy to connect Vaagso with the Norwegian mainland — gives a bird's eye view of the four gun-pits as they are today. All survive basically intact, except No. 1, half of which disappeared when the rock on which it stood was cut away to make room for a small industrial site. The remaining half now sits precariously on top of a steep cliff. The rocky beach where the four boats of Group 3 touched down is just below the clump of trees in mid-centre. The commandos had to charge up the steep slope to get to the guns. The slim, globe-topped pillar to the right of the trees is the Vaagso raid memorial.

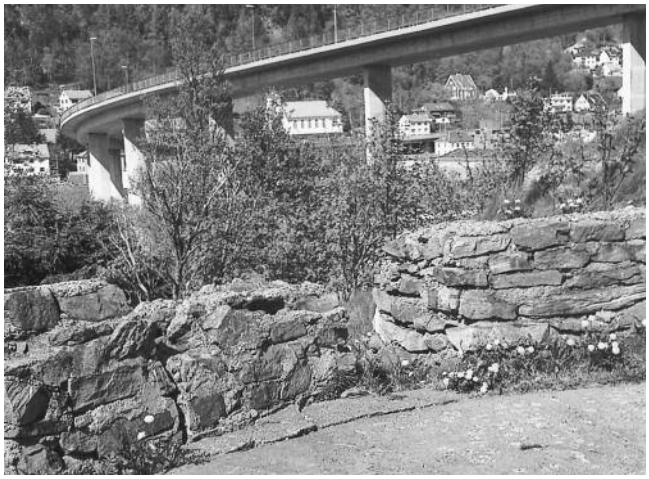
On leaving the infantry landing ship, Group 2 moved forward in its landing craft with Group 3, which was to attack Maaloy Island, to starboard. It was now half light, and the shore was becoming visible. The roar of the bombardment was loud and continuous, buildings were soon in flames, and it looked to the oncoming commandos as though the island had been reduced to a shambles. Only a hundred yards from the shore, the agreed signal, a shower of red Very lights, was sent up; the bombardment ceased immediately, and then the ten Hampdens of No. 50 Squadron, which had been circling above, swooped down to 50 feet and dropped their smoke bombs along the edge of the island, rapidly shrouding it in a pall of white smoke, which covered the troops on the last few hundred yards of their journey. To onlookers in the ships, the Hampdens appeared 'to float along the air just above the water'. They were, in fact, flying at more than 200 miles an hour. All went well save that one Hampden was hit, probably at the moment when the bomb-aimer was about to drop a smoke bomb. The pilot could have turned away and might have been able to alight safely on the sea near the ships. He chose to carry on and fulfil his mission if he could, but the aircraft went out of control, and the bomb fell on an assault landing craft of Group 2, wounding 20 men. The Hampden fell into the water, and only one of its crew was rescued.

Group 3 (consisting of Nos. 5 and 6 Troops of No. 3 Commando) had an unexpectedly easy assault. To the sound of their commanding officer, Major Jack Churchill's, bagpipes playing the *March of the Cameron Men,* they landed dry-shod on Maaloy Island. On the way thither, their craft looked to watchers from the air 'like tadpoles with white tails moving in perfect formation for the beach'. There they found a low rocky cliff, on the top of which they formed up and advanced. The island was thick with the smoke of the shells and smoke bombs. Going uphill, the commandos found and captured the four German guns, which had been abandoned by their crews. One gun was still serviceable and it was quickly turned on a German flak ship.

Although it would have been nice to say that this is Troopers Mapplebeck and Hannan firing gun No. 2 at the German armed trawler *Föhn,* this is in fact the same gun as in the previous picture, being prepared for demolition by commando sappers. The guns captured at Maaloy were Belgian 75mm field guns taken over by the Wehrmacht in 1940. Set up as static coastal guns, the Germans had fitted them on to turntables which pivoted around a central joint and on a circular rail, enabling the guns to make a 360-degree turn. (IWM)

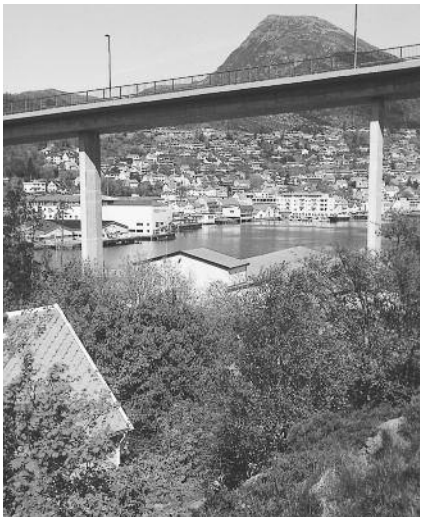
Unbelievably after nearly 60 years, the original turn-table of gun No. 4 still survives, toppled over the side of the gun-pit and left to rust under the brushwood. The pivot joint, cut loose from the table, lies nearby. A forgotten relic worth to be preserved.

Above: **The huts below the gun battery had been set on fire by the pre-landing bombardment by the six- and four-inch guns of the cruiser *Kenya* and destroyers *Onslow* and *Offa*. Whereas the guns themselves were taken practically without a bullet being fired, it took a few sharp fights to clear out the barracks area, 11 Germans being killed there. From the high ground they were on, the troops on Maaloy had a clear view of the fighting going on in Vaagso, across the narrow straits. The black smoke rising above the soldier's head is from the Ulvesund Hotel, a centre of German resistance, set on fire during the commandos' attack. (IWM)** *Below*: **The same view of Vaagso from Maaloy today. The new bridge, built in 1973, dominates the view, but the two-storied building immediately below and to the right of where it enters the town forms a recognisable link with the wartime image. (This is the same building appearing prominently in the pictures on pages 12-14).**



Left: **From gun-pit No. 4, a commando lieutenant communicates by wireless, while down below the barrack huts of the German gun-crews burn. Gun No. 4 was captured by No. 5 Troop under Captain Sandy Ronald. Note that the trooper in front has already taken a German helmet for a souvenir (IWM).** *Right*: **Again, the stonework of the wall identifies the spot.**

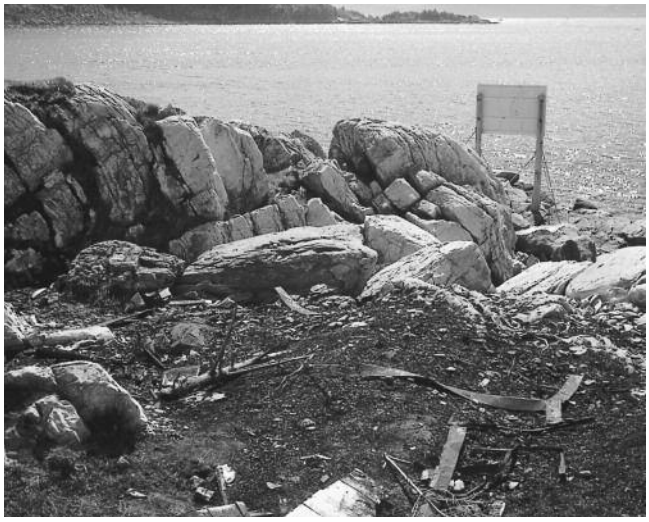
The men advanced to the German barracks, where they killed 11 Germans and took 31 prisoners, one of whom was the German officer in command, a fat man, the owner of the boots. The island of Maaloy was entirely in British hands by 9.20 a.m. About an hour was spent searching it and removing the office files from the German barracks. No. 5 Troop under Captain Sandy Ronald was sent to Mortenes on the other side of the Ulvesund to blow up the herring-oil factory there, which task they accomplished without meeting any opposition. Soon after 10.30 a.m., part of No. 6 Troop were ordered to re-enter their craft too and — led by their troop commander, Captain Peter Young — go to the help of their hard-pressed comrades of Group 2 in South Vaagso.



Left: **Nearby, a few yards lower down, commandos watch as the German ammunition dump on Maaloy is blown up. (IWM)** *Right*: **Two dwelling houses now occupy the site where the huts stood, almost hidden from view by the spring growth. Across the water, Vaagso town has expanded greatly, new housing now covering the whole hillside.**

Left: **Still more to the right, the ship's bombardment has set fire to a waterfront warehouse. (IWM)** *Right*: **Since the war, the north-western part of Maaloy has been extended with a large platform area to encompass for new warehouses and fish-factory buildings. This is the best comparison possible today — our pictures being taken in May 2000.**

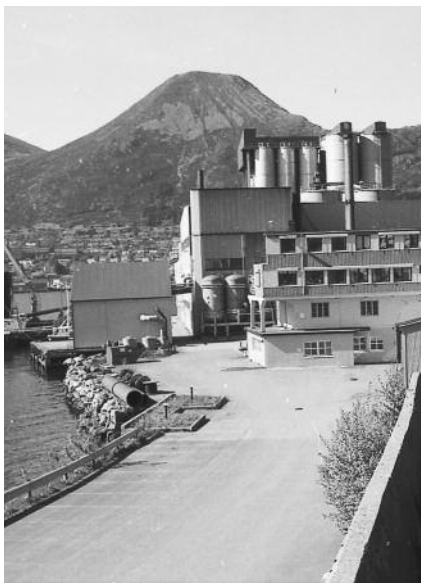
The fighting on Maaloy over, German wounded are carried to the landing beach on stretchers. (IWM)

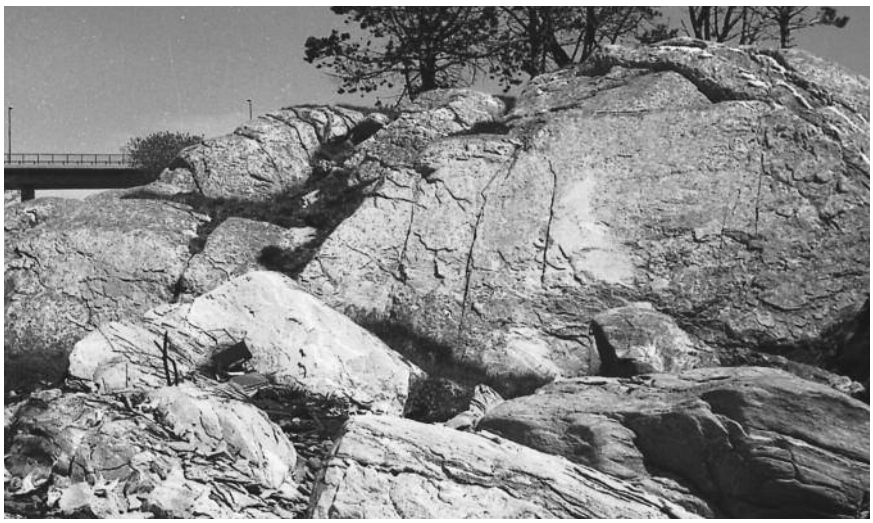


The same rocky beach today, looking south-east across the Ulvesund, with Vaagsfjord running left to right on the horizon.

German prisoners wait to be taken aboard the landing craft. They will be ferried to one of the troop transports and taken back to England. Altogether, Group 3 captured one officer and 24 men of the artillery, two naval signallers, one groom, one pay clerk and two women — one a Norwegian, the other Italian. (IWM)

Back on the beach, Major Churchill (on the left nearest to the camera — his sword now safely in its scabbard) and other officers confer to decide on the next action. About 0940 hours, Churchill received a wireless message from Durnford-Slater, the CO of No. 3 Commando who had landed at South Vaagso with Group 2, to the effect that they had met severe opposition and asking for immediate reinforcement. With Captain Ronald's No. 5 Troop just dispatched to the far side of the Ulvesund to blow up the Mortenes herring-oil factory (*below left*), all Churchill could scrape together was 18 men from Captain Young's No. 6 Troop, and these were quickly sent on their way.





Looking back up from the beach. The four gun-pits are higher up the slope, beyond the clump of trees.

Right: **The landing craft carrying Captain Young and his party approaches Vaagso from Maaloy. To save time, rather than land at Group 2's original landing-place, Young had ordered the boat officer to land his craft closer in, near the church, where he could see soldiers in khaki on the waterfront. Lieutenant Malindine, who took this picture, had landed on Maaloy with Group 3. Spotting the chance to cross over to the Vaagso side to cover the fighting there, he and cameraman Jack Ramsden had jumped aboard Young's craft at the last second. (IWM)** *Centre right*: **Where there was water in 1941, there is firm ground today. After the war, tiny Maaloy was connected to Vaagso by a 200-yard-long causeway. This enables us to match up Malindine's shot without having to hire a boat or getting our feet wet.**

Group 2 (consisting of Nos. 1, 3 and 4 Troops of No. 3 Commando) had landed very close to the town and quickly silenced two light machine-gun posts. They then advanced into the town itself, where they met considerable opposition. The Germans were by this time fully on the alert, and defended themselves with great resolution in the various buildings in which they were established. Their snipers were particularly effective; they had taken up a position on the hillside west of the town, where they lay protected by excellent natural cover, and caused a number of casualties.

By 10 a.m. the southern part of the town of South Vaagso was in British hands, but the position in its northern part was more difficult. The two forward troops were held up and had lost their troop commanders, Captain John Giles of No. 3 Troop and Captain Algy Forrester of No. 4 Troop, killed, and three other officers wounded. The Norwegian Army Captain Martin Linge, at the head of his unit, made a very vigorous and brave assault on the German headquarters in the Ulvesund Hotel, and died riddled with machine-gun bullets. He was soon avenged by his men, who threw hand-grenades into the building and set it on fire.

By then, the situation was that small parties, many of them under the command of junior NCOs, were making very slow progress against stiff German house-to-house opposition. Nor was time on their side; they had to accomplish their task by a fixed hour in order that the timetable for the withdrawal of the force might not be upset. It was time for reinforcements and they were now called for.

About 9.30 a.m., Brigadier Charles Haydon threw in the floating reserve, Group 4 (one troop of No. 2 Commando under Captain Dick Hooper). They moved on the north side of the town to the left flank. A few minutes after their arrival, Group 1, which had captured Hollevik without opposition, also arrived and began to drive through the centre of the town and along the waterfront. Not long afterwards, Captain Young's party from No. 6 Troop of Group 3 came in from Maaloy Island.

Above: **Group 2, the main assault force comprising Nos. 1, 3 and 4 Troops of No. 3 Commando, had landed just south of the southernmost houses of Vaagso. By an unfortunate fluke, a smoke bomb from one of the Hampdens had landed right in one of its six landing craft, just as it hit the beach, the burning phosphorus and oil killing or wounding almost everyone aboard, virtually wiping out the whole of Lieutenant Arthur Komrower's section of No. 4 Troop. After the wounded had been extracted, the blazing craft was pushed out into the fjord where it sank a short distance from the shore. Here, two of the five remaining craft await the return of the commandos, guarded against air attacks by two troopers with a Bren gun. (IWM)** *Right*: **The same rocky beach today.**

Above: **A little nearer to the town, Malindine pictured what appears to be a headquarters group conferring. The trooper looking into the camera is carrying a demolition charge and plunge-igniter. Demolitions in South Vaagso were the responsibility of No. 1 Troop, who were to blow up important objects as they were uncovered by the two assault troops, Nos. 3 and 4. The flames visible on the right are from one of the civilian houses set on fire by the sea bombardment. (IWM)** *Right*: **The lone house on the left still stands, albeit now surrounded by new houses. Instead of snow, we had glorious sunshine when we took our comparisons.**

The fighting in South Vaagso was limited to the southern half of the town, German opposition to the surprise landing proving remarkably strong and determined. The British advance along the town's single main street was held up at the Ulvesund Hotel where the Germans had improvised a defensive position. The commander of No. 4 Troop, Captain Algy Forrester, was killed leading a frontal assault on this strong point. In this picture by Malindine, the hotel is just ahead, hidden from view by the building on the left. The men in the foreground are delivering a load of mortar ammo. (IWM)

Left: **With Forrester killed, and other officers fallen casualty too, the only officer remaining on the scene was the commanding officer of the Free Norwegians, Kaptein Martin Linge. Taking command of No. 4 Troop, he led another assault on the Ulvesund, but was killed as he charged around a corner of the adjacent building. He stumbled forward and fell almost across the doorstep of the hotel. The site where it stood is now a small park.** *Right*: **Today, Martin Linge is a national hero and a household name in Norway. A sculpture of him stands on the spot where he fell.**

Left: **The commando force's only three-inch mortar shelling the Ulvesund at very short range. Not officially part of their weaponry, this mortar had been scrounged up from somewhere by Captain Bill Bradley of No. 1 Troop, who had organised a mortar detachment under Sergeant Ramsey to man it during the raid. Firing at 100 yards' range, with the mortar tube almost in vertical position, Ramsey's mortarmen lobbed ten rounds through the roof of the Ulvesund, setting it on fire. Thereupon, the survivors of No. 4 Troop charged the building and overran it. A still from the cine footage. (IWM)** *Right*: **The house which stood on the right-hand side of the street has gone, and a dull factory wall now takes its place.**

Above: **Troops mopping up after the attack on the Ulvesund Hotel — its fire-blackened side wall being visible up ahead. The trooper in the centre carries another demolition block. On the left, one of the mortarmen is moving the three-inch tube to a new position. After the fall of the Ulvesund, a runner called the mortar crew forward to help revive the stalled attack on the German harbourmaster's office further up the main street, which until then had resisted all attempts to storm it. A rain of mortar shells on the building soon forced the Germans out the back door. (IWM)**
Below: **One of the few corners of South Vaagso little affected by the passage of time.**

Thus by 11 a.m., four out of the five groups composing the attacking force were concentrated in South Vaagso, bent on the task of overcoming the enemy. Lieutenant-Colonel Durnford-Slater, having dispatched his reinforcements about their allotted task, came forward himself with No. 6 Troop of No. 3 Commando, which had just arrived from Maaloy, and took control of the situation. 'His two orderlies', runs the official report, 'were both wounded, but with great coolness and complete disregard for personal safety, he reorganised his forces and directed a northward drive through the town until, when he judged the situation to be well in hand, he left Captain Peter Young (in command of No. 6 Troop) in charge and returned to report progress to the flagship.'

Some idea of the nature of this house-to-house fighting can be gained from the account of No. 6 Troop's attack on two warehouses. The second of the two, called the Red Warehouse, was held by a small party of determined Germans, but the first was found to be unoccupied. Captain Young posted two men at a window on the third floor with orders to give covering fire to the rest of the troop when they rushed the Red Warehouse. Between the two warehouses was a small building with a pile of wood beside it; it provided a useful jumping-off place from which to launch the final attack on the Red Warehouse some 60 yards away. No. 6 Troop rushed this building, losing a sergeant killed and one man wounded. A burst of tommy-gun fire through the door produced two Germans, who ran out to surrender. One of them was an opera singer. These were followed by a German sailor and a civilian. The rest of the attack can be told in the words of Captain Young, who was awarded the MC.

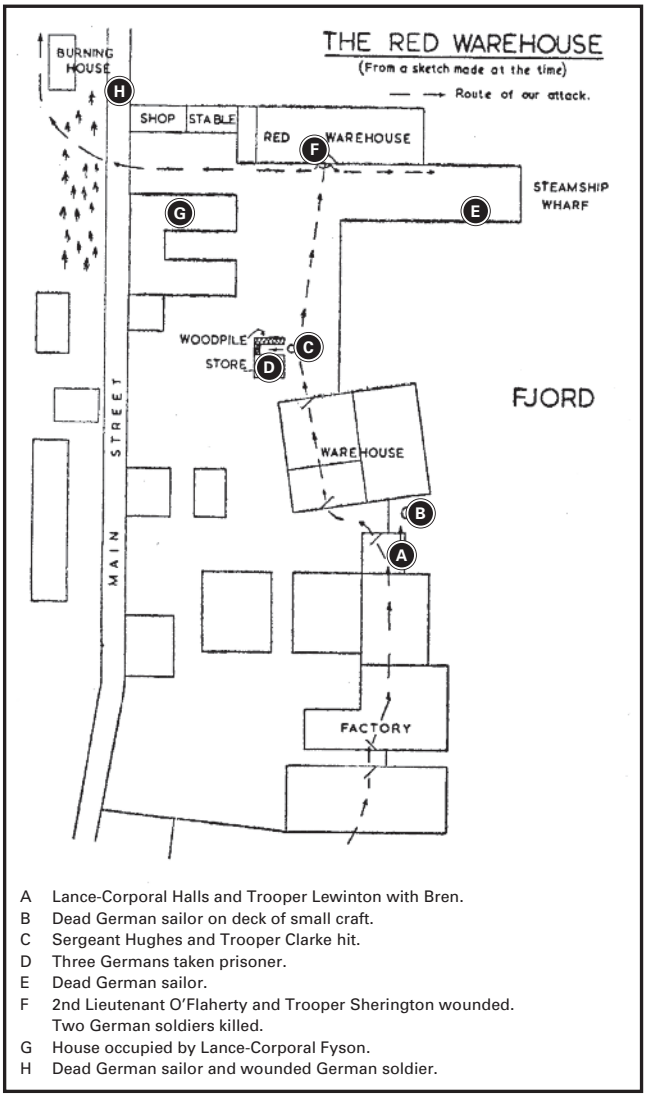
'I decided to advance immediately to our front and seize the Red Warehouse on the steamship wharf. It was about 60 yards away and, I thought, unoccupied. When, however, I was some ten yards from the door I saw a German soldier standing there, wearing a steel helmet and a long overcoat. I fired at him from the hip, swerved to my left and got down behind a crate standing against the warehouse wall. My men were coming up at the double in the most determined manner; Lance-Sergeant George Herbert came first. The Germans threw three stick bombs at us without doing any damage, though one fell within ten yards but did not explode. Our retaliation was to put a dozen Mills bombs into the building, mostly through the door. I then ran into the building shouting 'Hände hoch!' thinking that they had been done for; I was immediately shot at from an inner door, returned the fire and came out of the warehouse.

The street fighting in Vaagso was deadly, the battle soon resolving itself into a series of isolated skirmishes around buildings, backyards and narrow alleys. Chance encounters at corners led to sudden bursts of automatic fire. Unfortunately, with the postwar expansion of the huge fish factory in the southern part of Vaagso, many of the houses which stood between the main street and the waterfront have gone, making comparisons of these shots impossible. (IWM)

Right: **Though much has changed, the advance by Captain Young's party through the warehouse area along the waterfront can still be traced in present-day Vaagso.**

The fish factory through which Young started his advance. The view is north. The open ground alongside the factory held two parallel alleys in 1941.

The first warehouse, as seen from the northern exit of the fish factory. (where Young left two men with a Bren gun — [A] on the sketch). Thus covered, the others dashed across the open space and through the warehouse door.



A Lance-Corporal Halls and Trooper Lewinton with Bren.
B Dead German sailor on deck of small craft.
C Sergeant Hughes and Trooper Clarke hit.
D Three Germans taken prisoner.
E Dead German sailor.
F 2nd Lieutenant O'Flaherty and Trooper Sherington wounded. Two German soldiers killed.
G House occupied by Lance-Corporal Fyson.
H Dead German sailor and wounded German soldier.

'Lieutenant Denis O'Flaherty and I posted men to cover every window and the door of the warehouse while we reconnoitred it in order to find a way in. The Colonel, however, then came up and told us that we must push on. I decided to burn the place down. We removed three draught horses from the stables where they had been slightly wounded when Lance-Sergeant Connolly flung a grenade into the place on hearing movement in it. We were unable to enter the warehouse from the stables.

'It was while I was organising the job of burning down the warehouse, as opposed to rushing it, that I suddenly saw Lieutenant O'Flaherty and Trooper Sherington dash into the building by the front door. They were both armed with tommy guns. . . . I felt I had to go, too. I was at the bottom of the stairs leading to the second floor, when I heard two shots and both O'Flaherty and Sherington fell. I then fired at the inner door and again withdrew. It was difficult to see how we could rescue them, as they were both lying in the middle of the room covered by the enemy, who could not be seen, for they were standing in the darkness of the inner room not five yards away. Sherington gasped out that he had been shot from the next room.

The area of the small storage building [D], where three Germans were taken prisoner, and of the woodpile [C] where Young rallied his men for the charge on the Red Warehouse.

What remains of the Red Warehouse [F] today. When he failed to rush the building, Young decided to set it on fire. Entry from this side is now blocked by a brick wall.

Left: **Lieutenant Denis O'Flaherty, seriously wounded during the assault on the Red Warehouse, is helped to the rear. A section commander in No. 2 Troop, O'Flaherty had gone ashore at Hollevik with Group 1. Finding no trace of the gun supposed to be there, he had marched his men to Vaagso town to join the fighting there. Reconnoitring the area to the right of the main street, he bumped into two Germans in one of the alleys beside the fish factory. He shot the first, but the second threw a grenade which hurled him over on his face, breaking his nose. Shortly after, as he led his men forward, a sniper bullet nicked his shoulder. Advancing with Peter Young's party, the lieutenant was finally stopped when he charged into the enemy-held Red Warehouse. A German bullet broke his jaw, split his palate and took out one eye. Still, when he came to, O'Flaherty managed to heave himself up, stagger out of the building and, though already in shock from loss of blood, attempt to explain the situation of the Germans inside to Young. Unable to make anything out of his stammering, Young sent him to the rear. (O'Flaherty recovered from his wounds. After two years in hospital and eight major operations, he rejoined the commandos, minus one eye but still full of fight.) (IWM)**

'It seemed to us that the best thing to do would be to go up the stairs and try to shoot the enemy through the ceiling, though this was obviously going to be difficult. At that moment, however, O'Flaherty and Sherington walked out of the room. Sherington had been hit in the leg and O'Flaherty looked as if he had had a plate of strawberry jam flung in his face. Trooper Hannan caught O'Flaherty as he fell and Lance-Corporal Darts got hold of Sherington. I sent them back to the rear, and dispatched Corporal Chapman of No. 2 Troop to get fire bombs while Trooper Dick Hughes fetched a bucket of petrol. Lance-Sergeant Herbert flung this into the room.' A moment later the warehouse was ablaze.

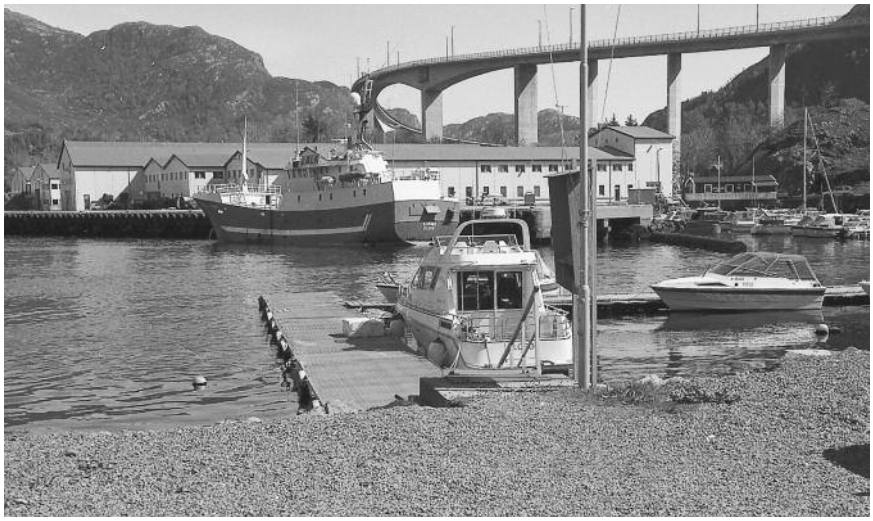
The lone house at the southern end of town (see page 12) makes for an easy comparison.

More wounded being carried back. The stretcher-bearer at left rear is Sergeant Chitty of No. 3 Commando's provost section. (IWM)

The wounded are carried down to the landing craft. (IWM)

Looking from the landing-point up to the coastal road.

Above: **Not all of the wounded were evacuated through the original landing-point. This trooper is being taken to a landing craft that has beached across the road from the town cemetery, just to the south of the fish factory. This is about the spot where Captain Young had landed, and No. 106 may well be the same boat that had ferried his party across from Maaloy. The landing vessels used in Operation 'Archery' were Assault Landing Craft (ALCs) of the then-latest model, with the cox'un's position moved from rear to starboard forward. The vessel's designation was later changed to LCA (Landing Craft, Assault). (IWM)**
Right: **The wooden building has gone, and the pebbled beach changed to a marina quay, but at least Maaloy across the straits is no longer covered in smoke. It is only by a careful comparison with the pictures taken from Maaloy that we are able to pinpoint where Malindine took this particular picture.**



Their Saturday morning breakfast rudely disturbed by the sudden eruption of fighting in their town, inhabitants of Vaagso dash to safety. This is Leiv Skaar, carrying his little sister Astrid on his back, pictured by Lieutenant Malindine on the coastal road near Group 2's landing-point. Note the naval officer in the background. No less than 77 inhabitants of Vaagso decided to depart with the commandos leaving hearth and home to escape German occupation and join the Free Norwegians in Britain. (IWM)

Closer in, commandos help Norwegian citizens out of the firing line. These are members of the Myhre family, whose house lay between the Ulvesund Hotel and the fish factory and was threatened by the flames of the blazing hotel. The man in the white shirt is Ingebrikt Myhre; being helped down the wall is his wife Alette, and behind her is their son Andr. This part of South Vaagso has been unrecognisably changed by the new road bridge, hence no comparison. (IWM)

One of the prime aims of the raid was to destroy as much as possible of Vaagso's fish factories. Though few people realised it, these factories — in particular those producing fish oil — were of vital importance to the German war economy. Fish oil is particularly rich in glycerine which is one of the basic ingredients in the manufacture of military explosives. It is also a rich source of vitamins A and B, which are vital nutrients for submarine crews (compensating for their lack of sun exposure) and were thus of prime importance to the German Kriegsmarine. Here, the commandos have set fire to the oil stock of the fish factory at the southern end of South Vaagso (this is not the canning factory marked on the map on page 5, but the factory through which Captain Young started his attack — see sketch on page 15). (IWM)

Flames leap high as the fire breaks through the collapsed roof of the factory. (IWM)

The old wooden jetty from which the two commandos watched has gone, but this is the same spot along the waterfront.

It is 0945 hours and the destroyer *Oribi* runs the straits between Vaagso and Maaloy under fire from the Germans in the town. Followed by her sister ship *Onslow*, she is to steam up the Ulvesund sound and land Group 5 — one section of No. 6 Troop of No. 2 Commando under Captain David Birney — some three miles further to the north to prevent German reinforcements coming down to South Vaagso via the coastal road. While in the sound, the two destroyers attacked, disabled and sank one German armed trawler (capturing her code-books — the major intelligence find of the raid), one schuyt, three steamers, and one armed tug. (IWM)

The narrow passage between South Vaagso and Maaloy is now closed by the new causeway connecting the two islands, and Maaloy has been extended to the north, but the Hanekammen mountain (625m) across the water still towers high above the sound.

Similar scenes to this were being played throughout the town, as determined men in ones and twos ran stumbling and slithering through snow-covered backyards to burst open the doors of cold, featureless buildings where small bodies of the enemy, with a determination and a tenacity almost equal to that of the commandos, stood at bay.

At 9.45 a.m., the destroyers *Oribi* and *Onslow* passed through the narrow passage between Maaloy Island and South Vaagso and entered Ulvesund. They were on their way to deliver Group 5 (made up of one half-troop of No. 2 Commando under Captain David Birney) to their destination further north. Group 5 was put ashore at Rodberg and subsequently blew craters in the road between North and South Vaagso, captured a quisling and destroyed the telephone exchange at North Vaagso.

By now it was full daylight and the scene as seen from the destroyers did not lack majesty. 'As the day grew lighter, and the flames and flashes that belong to a raid became less theatrical, steep mushrooms of smoke, some of it oily black and some quite an ordinary bonfire grey, stretched languidly into a very dear sky. An hour or so later, the sun must have topped the crest behind us sufficiently to touch the peaks ahead. They were quite suddenly, quite surprisingly coloured a violent, vivid mauve which spread quickly downwards until it reached the water of the fjord, was gone in a second, and left the slopes brilliant in sunlit snow and deep folds of indigo shadow.'

Ahead, the destroyers soon sighted two German merchant ships and an armed trawler under way steaming northwards. There was also a schuyt of about 2,000 tons, the *Eismeer*. She was anchored close in shore, and as the destroyers passed, the crew waved the Dutch flag, a ruse de guerre which succeeded for the moment. The British warships were cheered as they moved up the fjord by Norwegian patriots on either side. The merchant ships and the trawler disregarded orders to heave to, and having rounded Brandhaevnes Point they beached themselves, the *Norma* of about 2,200 tons to the southward, the *Reimar Etzard Fritzen* of about 3,000 tons in the centre and the armed trawler *Föhn* to the north. Fire was opened upon them, and at 10 a.m. precisely a boarding party left the *Onslow* to board, first the *Föhn* and then the *R.E. Fritzen.* The German captain of the *Föhn* was a gallant man. On first sighting the British destroyers he had rounded up the two other German ships under heavy fire and driven them ahead of him; he also opened fire on the RAF bombers and may have hit one of them.

Left: **At 1000 sharp, *Oribi* landed Birney's group (only 35 strong) here, at the village of Rodberg (Raudeberg), just south of North Vaagso which lies in the distance. While a strong patrol went into North Vaagso to take out the telephone office and arrest the local quisling leader, Johan Setland, the rest of the landing party prepared the demolition of the coastal road at this narrow point** (*right*) **just south of the village. Once all tasks had been accomplished, and under increasing pressure from German attacks, the group re-embarked in their whale-boats to be picked up by *Oribi*.**

Herdla airfield under attack. Located 80 miles south of Vaagso, this Luftwaffe base could interfere with the raid, so 13 Blenheims were despatched to neutralise it. The black cloud of smoke in the centre shows a direct hit on a hangar. On the left, a Bf 109 attempts to take off. Two Blenheims were lost in the attack when they were hit by flak and collided with each other. (IWM)

The boarding party from the *Onslow* reached the *Föhn,* and was at once heavily sniped by a party of the *Föhn*'s crew which had gone ashore after the ship had beached. Lieutenant-Commander A. N. P. de Costabadie, leader of the party, reached the bridge of the *Föhn* where he found the German captain had been killed in the act of throwing over the side his confidential books. The lieutenant-commander took up a rifle and opened fire at the enemy from behind the inadequate shelter of a wooden boat. 'After some minutes', he said, 'the Germans ran from the road. I called to the two seamen with me and we pursued them with shots. . . . I remember laughing at the time for one of the seamen, after I had finished firing, said "Had not you better have your tin hat now, sir?" and I found that it had fallen off when I first boarded the ship.'

Sub-Lieutenant M. P. Vaux, went ashore with four men and immediately took prisoner 17 merchant seamen. While this was going on, the boarding party turned its attention to the *Fritzen.* Here a disappointment met them. Their leader, discovering a locked cupboard in the captain's cabin, blew away the lock with a shot from his revolver, and in doing so broke the three bottles of brandy which the cupboard contained.

The next ship to be boarded was the schuyt *Eismeer,* which the Germans had tried to disguise as a Dutchman. The boarding party was now under the fire of a very determined and accurate sniper who mortally wounded the stroke oar of the *Onslow*'s whaler, and subsequently prevented all attempts to raise the *Eismeer*'s anchor. The background of snow and black rock provided ideal concealment for snipers, whose fire was kept down but not silenced by Lewis, pom-pom, Oerlikon and machine-gun fire from the *Onslow.* Eventually all three ships were sunk by gun-fire from the *Onslow* and the *Oribi,* who joined her escort after having taken off Group 5 which had successfully completed its task.

While these ships were being sunk, a tug and another vessel of about 3,000 tons were seen to enter Ulvesund from the northward. She flashed her name, the *Anita L. M. Russ,* and the *Oribi* replied, thus momentarily deceiving the enemy. She could not send a boarding party because her boats were in-shore taking off Group 5. Realising what was happening, the tug turned hard a-port, the merchantman hard a-starboard, and both ran ashore. They were destroyed by gun-fire. Some of the German crew were picked up and said that they had at first imagined the destroyers to be German. When asked what they thought when they saw the White Ensign, their Chief Engineer answered for all, 'Vi ve vere ashtoundet.' They seemed apprehensive of their fate, but their self-confidence was restored when they were given hot drinks and allowed to listen to the Hamburg radio programme on the ship's wireless.

This was not the only part played by the Royal Navy. The Germans did not leave the bombardment of the island of Maaloy unanswered. The battery on Rugsundo was bombed by Hampden aircraft before the bombardment began. Though effective, the bombing did not destroy the battery, which opened fire on the *Kenya* at 8.56 a.m.

'While I was looking at the bombardment of Maaloy', said Wing-Commander A. H. Willetts, who led the Hampdens, 'I saw what looked like red-hot meteors streaking out from the Rugsundo battery. I could watch the whole length of their flight from the mouth of the gun to the moment when they burst in the sea, when they gave off a cloud of purple smoke.' The battery was engaged by the *Kenya* two minutes before 9 a.m. and was silenced two and a half minutes later. The smoke bombs dropped by the Hampdens around the battery undoubtedly played a very effective part in masking it. The Rugsundo battery re-opened fire more than once during the day and hit the *Kenya* twice, a shell holing her above the water-line abreast of the bridge at 1.17 p.m. After that, the Rugsundo battery was finally silenced.

The support provided by the Royal Air Force to the enterprise was of three kinds: close support, the bombing of the nearest German fighter airfield at Herdla, and a diversion off Stavanger. The part played by the Hampdens of No. 50 Squadron has already been described; in addition, Blenheims and Beaufighters of Nos. 404, 254, 235, 236 and 248 Squadrons from Wick and Sumburgh provided air cover. A Blenheim was lost shortly after 10 a.m. in an engagement with two Messerschmitt Bf 109s. Ten minutes later, two Junkers 88's appeared but were driven off by Beaufighters.

Altogether, fighter protection was provided from 9.28 a.m. in the morning until 4.15 p.m. in the evening by aircraft which had had to fly some 350 miles to reach the scene of fighting. The protection afforded was, on the whole, very successful. No bombs hit the ships. The most serious attack, which developed between 12.30 p.m. and 12.45 p.m., was driven off by anti-aircraft fire as well as by the fighters. In the air battles which took place, four Heinkel 111s were destroyed with a loss of two Beaufighters and a Blenheim. Another Blenheim reached base in safety, after hitting the sea and bending a propeller in a fight with a Bf 110; the observer and rear gunner were badly wounded.

The conditions under which air protection was afforded were very severe. The day before, a blizzard had struck the airfields in northern Scotland from which the aircraft were to operate, so that when the crews came to man them they found four inches of hard-frozen snow on the wings. They chipped it off as best they could with brooms and spades, but many of the aircraft took off with their wings snow-laden. The slipstream gradually blew away the snow.

The assault on Herdla airfield was a most accurate piece of timing. Thirteen Blenheims were ordered to bomb this base, at which German fighters and bombers could re-fuel and re-arm, precisely at noon. Herdla was provided with wooden runways and, if they could be destroyed, the German aircraft would be unable to take off or to land. The bombs struck the runways at one minute past noon precisely, blowing great holes in them, into one of which a Bf 109 fell just as it was about to take off, presumably for Vaagso, with the rest of its squadron. A diversion was also arranged and took place off Stavanger, where a squadron of Blenheims attacked enemy shipping with the object, in which it fully succeeded, of occupying the considerable enemy air forces in the area.

Above: **The main force returns to the landing craft. (IWM)** *Right:* **The wooden shed which stood beside the coastal road has gone. The roof visible on the right belongs to a new house.**

By 12.30 p.m., opposition in South Vaagso had almost ceased. For an hour or more before that time, the fjord had been covered with landing craft plying to and fro engaged in the work of ferrying wounded, prisoners and loyal Norwegians to the infantry assault ships. Almost all the military and economic objectives had been destroyed, among them all German offices, the wireless station, a German car and lorry park, four coast-defence guns, one anti-aircraft gun and a tank, an ammunition store, a German barracks, a searchlight and all the huts and houses inhabited by German soldiers. Every other installation of value to the enemy — the lighthouse, the main canning factory in South Vaagso, the herring-oil factory at Mortenes — had been entirely destroyed, while the Firda factory and two other small factories were left blazing from end to end.

At least 150 of the enemy had been killed, 98 German prisoners and four quislings had been taken. The number of loyal Norwegians who had accepted a passage to England was 77; nine ships of a total tonnage of nearly 15,000 tons were destroyed.

Left: **Four German prisoners — one of them still carrying their surrender flag — are being escorted down to the landing craft.**

At left, looking into the camera, Provost Sergeant Chitty. (IWM) *Right*: **On the coastal road just above the re-embarkation point.**

German POWs lined up aboard the troopship HMS *Leopold*. In all, the British took back 98 prisoners. The German troops in the Vaagso area mostly belonged to the 181. Infanterie-Division. After the raid, the division commander, Generalmajor Kurt Woytasch, had great difficulty reconstructing events, especially on Maaloy, where the entire garrison had either been killed or taken away. (IWM)

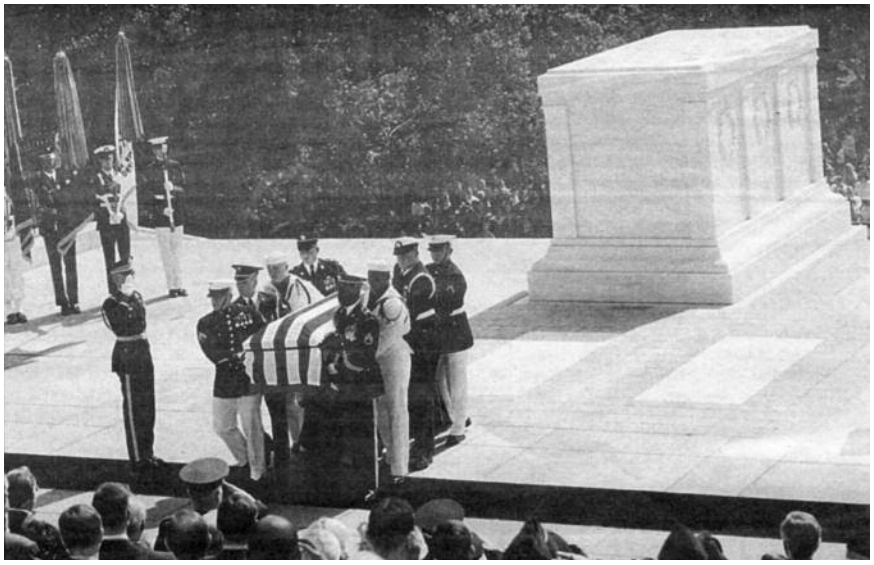
The withdrawal took place about 3 p.m. It was almost without incident save for an abortive bombing attack by Heinkels which was broken up by heavy anti-aircraft fire, the bombs falling wide. For an hour the force was escorted by Beaufighters. During dusk and bright moonlight, a single German aircraft attempted to attack the force but without success. It sailed steadily on, while the prisoners were being interrogated below decks and the wounded, of whom there were 71, including prisoners and Norwegians, were being attended to in the sick bays of the various ships. The 'Archery' force arrived back in Scapa Flow on December 28, the troopships sailing on to Invergordon next evening to discharge the commandos there on the 30th.

So ended the small but significant adventure of Vaagso. The forces engaged were not large, a cruiser and four destroyers of the Royal Navy, between 500 and 600 officers and men of the Army and a few squadrons of Hampdens, Blenheims and Beaufighters of the Royal Air Force, but its success was complete. It proved that if adequate naval and air support were forthcoming, Special Service troops could overcome strong opposition and complete their task.

Elated with the success of the raid, one of the commando troops poses with their commanding officer on board HMS *Leopold* during the return journey to Britain. Officially, commando soldiers were only on detached service from their parent regiments, hence the marked variety of headgear and cap badges. Commando losses in Operation 'Archery' were two officers and 11 other ranks killed, six officers and 46 men wounded, and five men died of wounds; the Norwegians had one officer killed and two men wounded — a total loss figure of 73. The Royal Navy had two men killed, the RAF 31. (IWM)

Royal Navy officers and sailors pose with the battle ensign taken from one of the destroyed German ships. Three of the enemy vessels attacked in the Ulvesund — *Föhn, Fritzen* and *Eismeer* — were boarded and searched by a whaler party from HMS *Onslow* before being wrecked and sunk by the destroyer's guns. One other German vessel, the armed trawler *Donner,* was stopped and boarded by a party from HMS *Offa* in open sea near the fjord entrance before it too was sunk. (IWM)

The memorial to the Vaagso raid on Maaloy. On it are listed the names of all Allied personnel — Army, Royal Navy, RAF, RCAF, RAAF, RNZAF, and Norwegian Army — who died in the operation, 52 men in all.



Left: **On America's Memorial Day in 1984, a fourth unknown servicemen was interred at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington which already contained burials for the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War. At the time, the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii only had four sets of unidentified remains from Vietnam, two of which were subsequently identified. The third was believed to be that of a foreigner, so the fourth, recovered from Vietnam in 1972 was chosen even though the Defense Department possessed an identity card, wallet and other items recovered from the crash site outside An Loc. On the night of May 13, 1998, workers cut open the stone slab and removed the casket** *(left)***, and subsequent DNA analysis confirmed the remains being those of Michael Blassie** *(right)*.

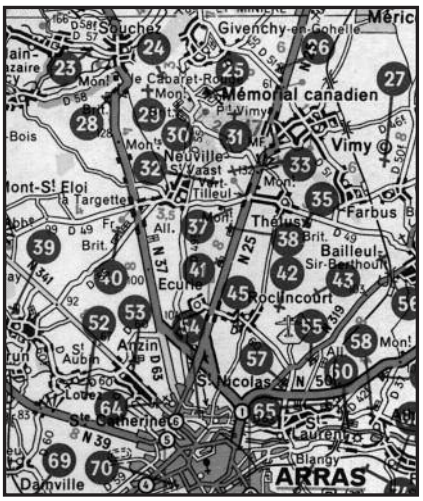
THE CANADIAN UNKNOWN SOLDIER

The concept of honouring an unidentified soldier as a symbol of a nation's war dead originated in France after the First World War, the idea quickly being taken up by Britain (see *After the Battle* No. 6). Since November 1920, the Unknown Warrior buried in Westminster Abbey in London has been a focus of British and Empire mourning for those who lost their lives in two world wars.

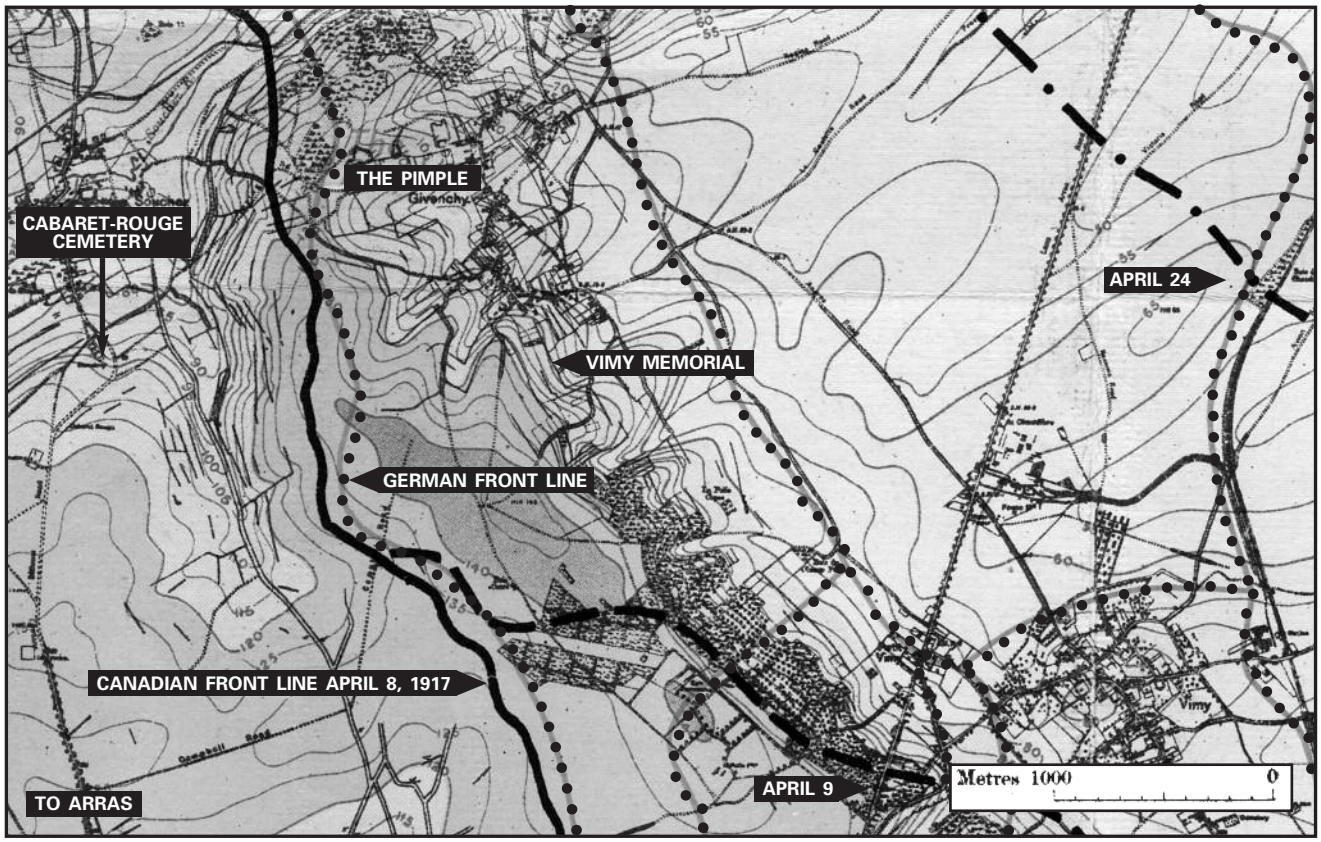
The United States followed suit the following year but, unlike Britain and France who acknowledged the remains of the World War 1 soldier as symbolically representing those killed in later wars, America later selected unknown servicemen to represent the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam (see *After the Battle* No. 26). However, the latter burial was thrown into disrepute in May 1998 when permission was given to accede to requests by the Blassie family to exhume the remains. They claimed that the unknown serviceman was, in fact, 1st Lieutenant Michael Blassie shot down over South Vietnam on May 11, 1972. There was also speculation that the remains might well belong to a Cobra helicopter pilot, Captain Rodney Strobridge, brought down on the same day. Indeed, seven other Americans were lost in the same general area of An Loc and, because fighting had also taken place there in the 1950s, it was possible that they could equally be the bones of a Frenchman . . . or even an Australian!

Although the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey is representative of all the casualties of Britain and its Empire, in 1993 Australia chose to have its own unknown warrior buried in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra (see *After the Battle* No. 83). Now another of the former dominions, Canada, has followed suit.

The Royal Canadian Legion was formed 1925-26 upon the unification of 15 different Canadian veterans' organisations. This amalgamation was completed under the auspices of the British Empire Ex-Services League (now the British Commonwealth Ex-Services League) founded in 1921 by ex-servicemen's groups in Britain, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia to care



Left: **These were subsequently reburied in Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St Louis, Missouri. (Connie Nisinger)** *Centre:* **In order to preclude any remote possibility of the identity of the serviceman who was to become Canada's Unknown Soldier being established, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission meticulously examined its records for a suitable candidate. Canada requested that the soldier should come from the area of the Vimy Ridge and, of the 1,600 graves marked 'A Canadian Soldier — Known Unto God', Grave 7 in Row E of Plot 8 at Cabaret-Rouge British Cemetery ([28] on map) was chosen.** *Right:* **The new headstone inscribed in English and French reads: 'The former grave of an unknown Canadian soldier of the First World War. His remains were removed on 25 May 2000 and now lie interred at the National War Memorial in Ottawa Canada'.**



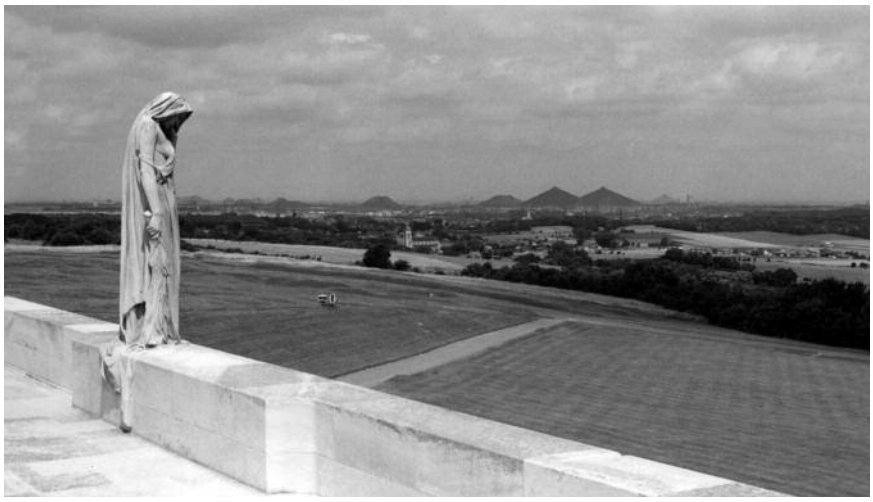
When first considering the proposal to establish an Unknown Soldier, the Canadian Legion had originally intended to select a grave in South Africa where Canada fought its first war of the 20th century. However it was later proposed by Major General Romeo Dallaire of the Department of National Defence that the soldier should be selected from the Vimy Ridge area — the location of the first major battle in the First World War fought by Canadians under Canadian leadership. The four-mile-long whaleback ridge had been captured by the Germans in October 1914 and turned into an impregnable fortress to dominate the rich coalfields of the Douai Plain. The French made two attempts to win back the heights in 1915, suffering around 150,000 casualties in the process, so very careful preparations were made by the Canadians for their attack scheduled for Easter Monday in 1917. A two-week barrage from over 900 guns firing over a million shells softened up the objective and nearly 300 machine guns raked the German positions at night. Then at precisely 5.30 a.m. on April 9, two mines were detonated beneath the German front line as the Canadian batteries opened up with high-explosive and gas shells. A smoke-screen was laid down by mortars to cover the dominant Hill 145, and 150 machine guns swept the ground 400 yards ahead of the attackers. The Canadians launched 15,000 men in their first wave against an estimated 5,000 dug-in Germans, with a second wave ready to follow on. In appalling weather of sleet and snow, the attack was incredibly successful and the whole of the enemy front line was in Canadian hands by 7 a.m. and by mid-afternoon Hill 145 had been taken in a brilliant action. 'The Pimple' to the north was secured three days later. (PAC)

Canadian soldiers look out from the Ridge towards the shattered village of Vimy in the far distance. (IWM)

for survivors from both the South African (Boer) War of 1899-1902 and Great War of 1914-18.

It was through the continued relationship of the Canadian Legion with the League that the idea for a Canadian Unknown Soldier became a reality. Some 71 years after it came into being, the Legion's senior leaders were attending the British Commonwealth Ex-Services League 26th Triennial Conference in South Africa. While there, General Duane Daly, the Legion's Dominion Secretary, arranged visits for the two members of the Legion's executive to the graves of Canadian soldiers killed during the South African War. Through his connections with the veterans' community, General Daly had already heard of the idea of having an unknown soldier established in Canada but knew that no positive efforts had been made to bring the idea into being. Therefore, while accompanying the Legion Dominion President Hugh Greene and Dominion First Vice-President Joe Kobolak to the Boer War grave sites, he broached the subject and on his return to Canada, and with the approval of the Legion's executive, General Daly opened discussions with various veterans' organisations and their members. And, as he had suspected, there was an enthusiasm for the idea that was hard to ignore.

Also at this time there was a general level of awareness of the price paid by Canada due to the multitude of ceremonies and tributes being organised to mark the forthcoming 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. For its part, the Legion was anxious to find a way to maintain this momentum to ensure that the perpetuation of remembrance in Canada continued into the next century.



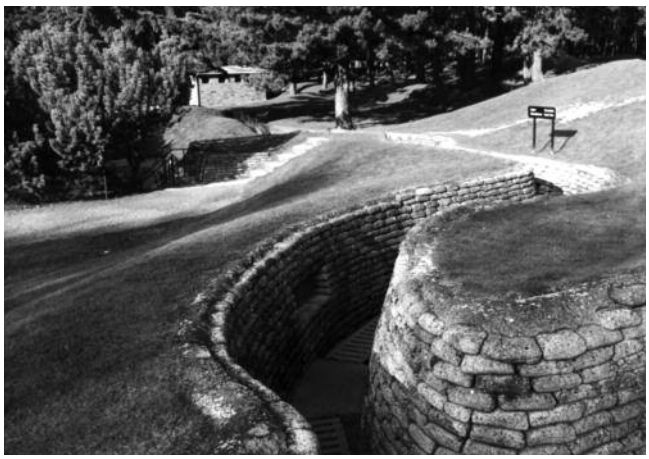
The statue 'Canada in Mourning' on the Canadian Memorial now looks out over the same ground, now marred by the huge slag heaps from the coalfields. Vimy church can be seen in the centre. (John Giles)

Encouraged by what he was hearing during his investigation, and by the consensus that seemed to be building, General Daly initiated discussions with Ottawa's National Capital Commission, the idea being to have the Commission consider the establishment of a major veterans' memorial in the city. Because the centrepiece of the regional plan was the establishment of a park as a memorial to veterans, his approach was received with some eagerness. Meetings continued into 1996 and a site on Elgin Street, a short distance from the Canadian National War Memorial, was tentatively offered.

Coincidentally, a Quebec-based communications firm, Communication et Développement Robert Bernier Inc., prompted by the establishment of Australia's Unknown Soldier in 1993, had initiated its own proposal for the repatriation of a Canadian unknown. Initial discussions between General Daly and the company indicated that the scope of their proposal was far larger than that envisaged by the Legion. Nevertheless a preliminary meeting was arranged in February 1997 between the company; the Legion; the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada; and the National Council of Veterans Associations. However, when the cost of the company's proposal became known, it received little support and Robert Bernier Inc. were later informed that the veterans had decided to proceed independently with the project.

On November 17, 1997, the Legion presented its own plan for the establishment of the 'Tomb'. The veterans' organisations agreed and proposed that the Legion should take the lead in developing the project. It was also decided that the costs should be minimised and that the scope of the programme should be kept at a modest level. The organisations also selected the National War Memorial as the preferred site and decided to ask the Government to shoulder the major costs.

Below left: **Adolf Hitler inspects the former Canadian front line at Vimy in June 1940.**
Below right: **Frozen in concrete, the sandbags have rotted away. (Peter Thompson)**

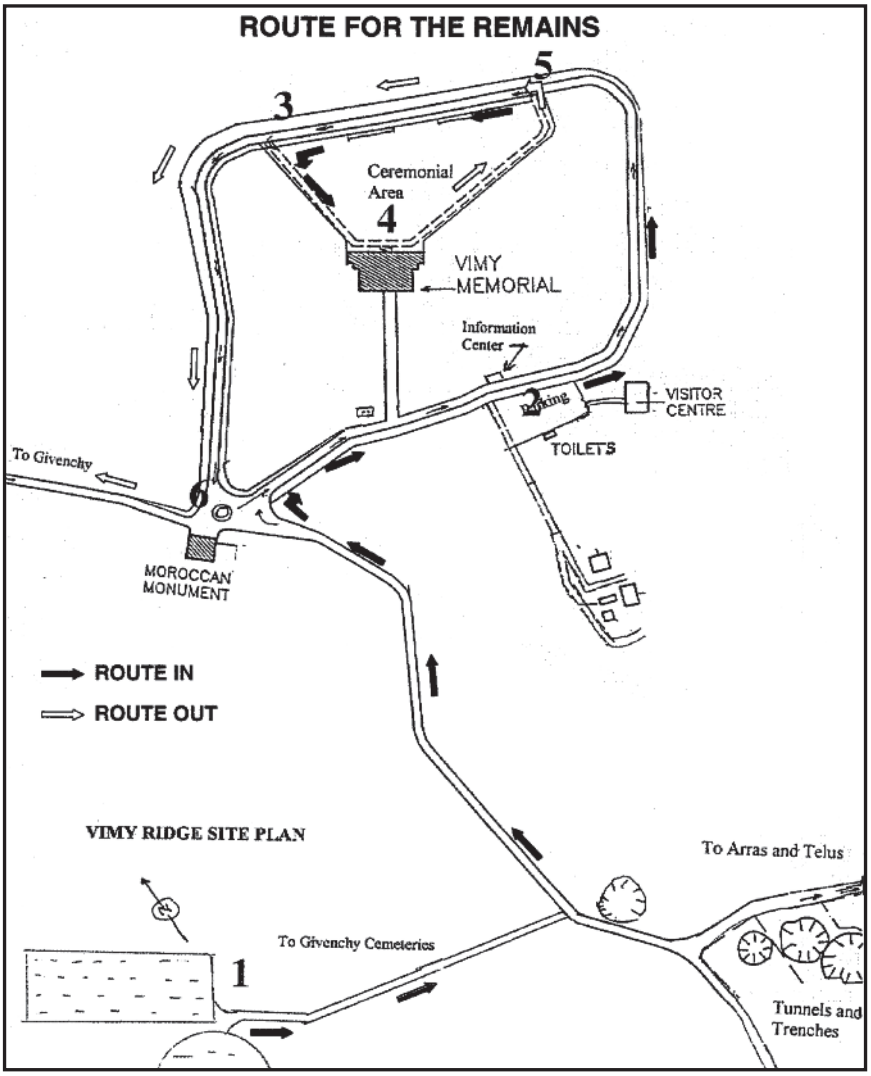


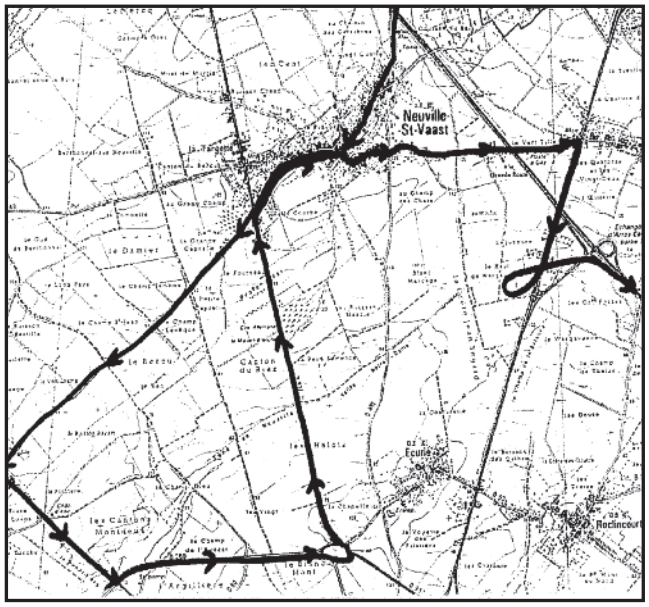
The Canadian Vimy Memorial was constructed on the heights of Hill 145 which is riddled with over 20 miles of tunnels bored by British, Australian and Canadian tunneling companies during the winter of 1916-17. Its unveiling in the Memorial Park on July 26, 1936 was one of the first duties of the uncrowned King Edward VIII. Sixty-four years later, all but two months, this was the setting on May 25, 2000 for the handing over of the remains of the fallen soldier disinterred from Cabaret-Rouge Cemetery for their return to Canada. Detailed instructions were prepared for Operation 'Memoria' and a full dress rehearsal with a dummy casket was held on the previous afternoon. *Overleaf:* **The Canadian bearer party, flanked by pallbearers from the United Kingdom, New Zealand, France (on the right) and South Africa, India and Australia, carries the casket from position 4 to where the French military hearse is waiting. Operation 'Memoria': 'Once they are ready, the casket is hoisted by the bearers and they begin to move to point 5. The military forces present arms, and the piper plays a lament . . .**

In the beginning, the Legion had considered that the unknown soldier should come from the ranks of those Canadians killed in South Africa, Canada's first war of the last century. However at another meeting held on March 12, 1998, Major-General Romeo Dallaire of the Department of National Defence, while committing the full support of the Canadian Forces to the project, argued that the soldier's remains should be returned from Vimy Ridge, near Arras in northern France, the location of a battle that was still considered by many Canadians to be the birthplace of the nation. The fact that this was the first major battle fought by Canadians under Canadian leadership lent credence to the proposal and all agreed that the remains should come from the Vimy area. The Canadian Minister of Veterans Affairs, Fred Mifflin, therefore corresponded with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) requesting that it consider Canada's wish to repatriate the remains of an unknown soldier in order 'to establish as a particular mode of commemoration, a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier'.

In its reply, the Commission sought certain assurances including Canada's continued support for the policy of non-repatriation and uniformity of treatment for the war dead of the First and Second World Wars and that Canada would not attempt, nor assist anyone in attempting to identify the remains. The Commission also stated that it would retain full autonomy in the matter of locating and exhuming the remains and that this would be done in private with a minimum of publicity, and that the remains, once repatriated, would remain a war grave and that the Commission would be fully consulted in all matters affecting the grave's on-going care and maintenance.

Canada agreed the conditions laid down by the Commission and approval was given by the CWGC on December 16, 1998. Included in the request from Canada was the desire that the remains be selected from the area of the Vimy Ridge as an appropriate symbol of Canada's wartime achievements.





At 10.40 a.m, the hearse, escorted by the French Gendarmerie, departed from Vimy for Lille where a CC150/A310 Airbus was waiting on the tarmac. However, to allow the troops and the bearer party to reach the airport first, they were transported on the direct route down the N17 to join the autoroute to Lille where they arrived at 12.20 p.m. Meanwhile, the hearse was taken on a roundabout route *(above)* **which added 18 minutes to the timetable and allowed the troops to be in position** *(right)* **when the casket arrived.**

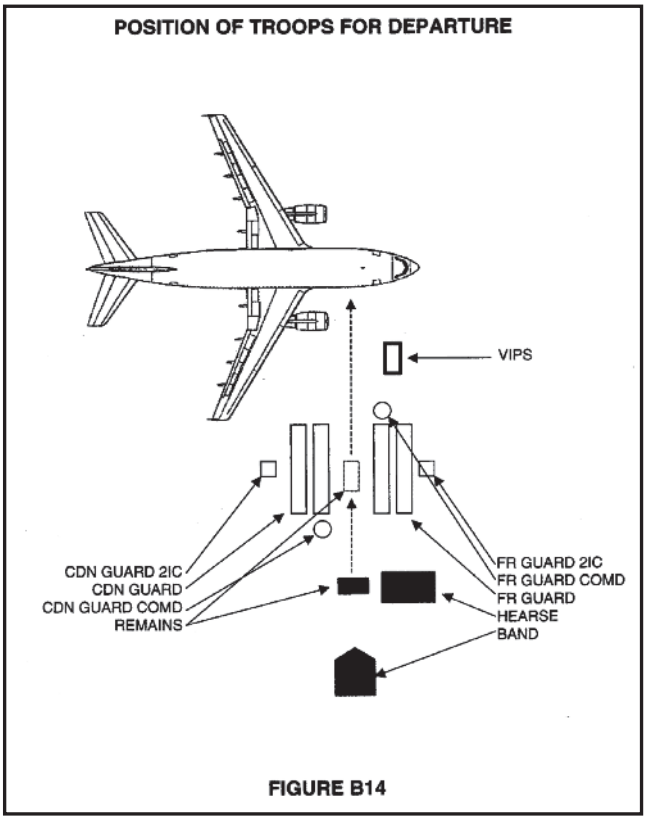


FIGURE B14

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records the names of 27,607 Canadians for whom the fortunes of war denied a known grave and whose names are thus commemorated on one of the many memorials to the missing. There are also some 7,000 graves marked as 'An Unknown Canadian' in various locations throughout the world. The mandate of the Commission is to mark and maintain the graves entrusted to it by the participating governments but this does not extend to making any attempt to identify any of the 200,000-odd Commonwealth burials marked as unknown. However, CWGC records sometimes contain information which would permit one to speculate on the identity of some of these unknown burials but the policy of non-disturbance of war graves, governed by the Geneva Convention to which all participating governments are signatories, means that any identification theories remain exactly that. In the case of Canada's specific request, the Commission took extreme care to choose a grave where such information did not exist, and the CWGC received Canada's assurance that it would not seek to identify nor assist anyone attempting to identify the unknown soldier.

On May 23, 2000, a Canadian military aircraft flew to France to carry the Unknown Soldier back to Canada. Led by the new Minister of Veterans Affairs, George Baker, those on board included a contingent from the Canadian Forces comprising a 45-strong honour guard, a bearer party, and a chaplain. The Veterans Affairs contingent included exservicemen and civilians and two representatives of Canadian youth. The military contingent which was to serve at the handover ceremony was formed by soldiers of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment.

Meanwhile, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission had selected and exhumed a suitable candidate from an unknown Canadian grave in Cabaret-Rouge Military Cemetery near Souchez.

On May 25, at a ceremony before the huge Canadian Memorial on Vimy Ridge, the Commission handed over the remains to Canada which were then transported to Lille airport for departure to Ottawa.

1235 hrs. **The troops are in position for arrival of the remains, as per fig B14. They are standing at attention with weapons at the shoulder.**
The VIPs and VAC group move into position as per fig B14.

1237 hrs. **The hearse arrives at the Gendarmerie post at the airport.**
The bearer party enters onto the tarmac and gets into position to accept the hearse, fig B14.
The Gendarmerie will inspect the casket and ensure that all documentation for the removal of the remains is in order. This is somewhat symbolic as the documentation will already have been approved.
Once completed the hearse will enter onto the tarmac and approach the unloading point, fig B14.

1242 hrs. **The remains arrive at the unloading point, fig B14.**

1243 hrs. **The remains are removed from the hearse.**
Both contingents will present arms.
The remains are secured to the flex pallet and subsequently loaded in to the aircraft hold in pallet position 1, fig B16.

This truly is a momentous occasion we are witnessing today. And a long overdue one. We are finally taking our unknown soldier home, and in so doing joining our Allies from the war years in creating at long last a 'Tomb of the Unknown Soldier' in Ottawa, our nation's capital.

That we do so in the company of Mr Paul Métivier, veteran of the First World War, and Mr Smokey Smith, veteran of the Second World War and Victoria Cross recipient, makes this particular act of remembrance and repatriation very special. So too are we honoured by the attendance of Mr Gordon Strathy, our Korean War witness, and Sgt Réjeanne Bélanger, representing our peacekeepers. I would also like to acknowledge and thank our honourary Pall Bearers — representing the French Army, the Australian Armed Forces, and military attachés from Great Britain, Canada, India, New Zealand and South Africa.

My thanks and appreciation also for the presence and remarks by Mr Dussourd, Préfet du Pas de Calais. The Vimy Memorial is one of the most magnificent in Europe, and Canadians will be forever grateful to the people of France for their generous gift of this land so long ago, a gift that continues to remind the world of the utter tragedy of war and the devastating loss to mankind that war brings.

Almost 28,000 Canadians who perished in wars in the last century have no known grave. Whether they flew the skies, sailed the forbidding seas in naval service or merchant convoy, or slogged it out on the battlefield, it is in the ghastly nature of war that the remains of many who fell in combat were never found, or at least have no identified burial place. Such is the case of the unknown soldier we are repatriating today. We know that he was Canadian and that he died in the First World War.

But we do not know if the young man died in the Battle for Vimy Ridge. Nor do we know his age. His unit. Or his date of death. No one does. And while the Vimy Memorial represents all the Canadians who died in the First World War, this young man represents all those who have answered the call to duty or who may yet be asked to serve — for the principles of peace and freedom, democracy and duty.

Today's ceremony is just part of a journey. A journey for this unknown soldier that has been over eight decades in the making. His journey will culminate in a few days time — where he will — in symbolic representation of all his comrades in arms — rest forever in peace at our National War Memorial. We mourn his sacrifice. We honour his memory. And salute all those who gave their lives for the cause of peace.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is indeed an historic day. It is a continuation of our promise to veterans that we would not forget their service and sacrifice. Not in this generation, or in generations to come. It is the birthright of our children and grandchildren to know their history. And their duty to pass it on to succeeding generations. In this way we will keep the flame of remembrance alive. Forever. I would now like to invite M. Dussourd to join me as we pay our respects in placing a floral tribute in honour of our unknown soldier.

THE HON. GEORGE BAKER
Minister of Veterans Affairs
Vimy Ridge, May 25, 2000

ARRIVAL AT THE CANADA RECEPTION CENTRE

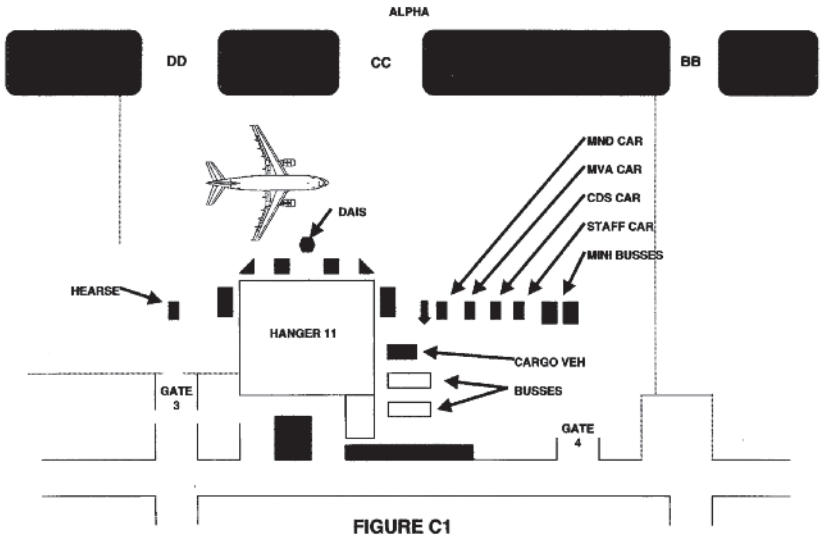
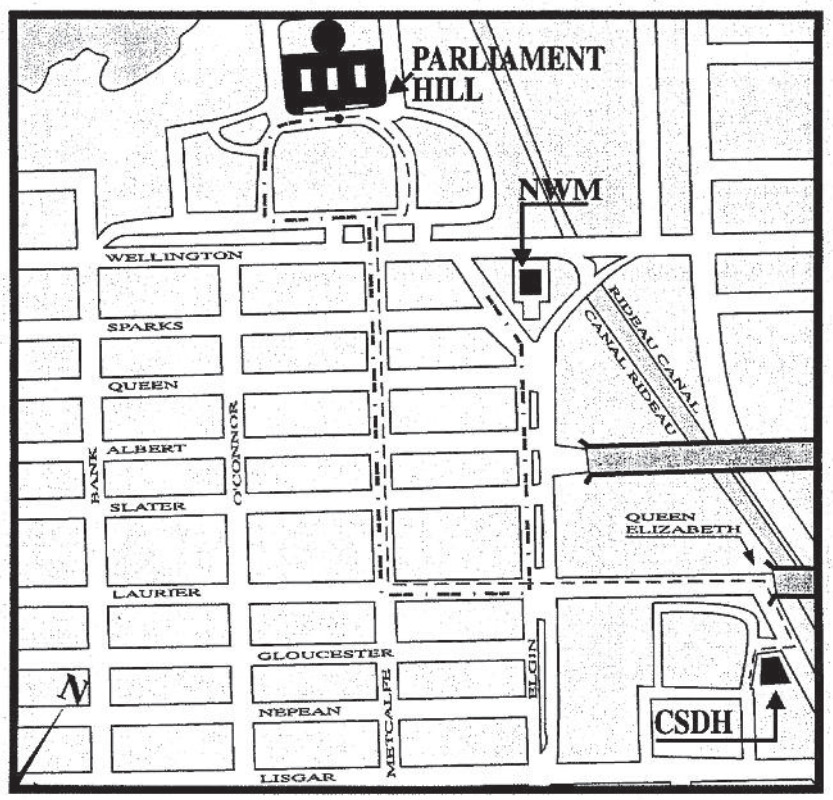


FIGURE C1

At 2 p.m. the Airbus left the ground carrying the Unknown Soldier on a journey that he made over 80 years before by ship. Eight hours later — at 4 p.m. Canadian time — the aircraft taxied up to Hangar 11 where a motorcade procession prepared to move the casket to the Cartier Square Drill Hall. '1730 hours. Once the motorcade stops, the bearer party removes the remains and takes them into the drill hall. The remains are positioned on the gun carriage and secured. 1740 hours. The veterans arrive to pay their respects. 1800 hours. The Naden Band arrive at the drill hall. 1820 hours. The parade prepares to depart for Parliament Hill.'

ROUTES — OP MEMORIA



CARTIER SQUARE DRILL HALL (CSDH) TO PARLIAMENT HILL

PARLIAMENT HILL TO NATIONAL WAR MEMORIAL (NWM)

FIGURE D2

The gun carriage on which the coffin was transported was acquired by the Canadian government from British military forces in 1874. The 9-pdr Mk I field piece had been left in a camp at Sweetgrass Hills, Saskatchewan, and was later put on display at the National Historic Park at Battleford. In 1877, it accompanied the Lieutenant-Governor of the Northwest Territories to Blackfoot Crossing, Alberta, for the signing of Treaty No. 7, later being put on display at Fort McLeod. Since 1930 it has been kept at the Division Depot at Regina, Saskatchewan. (Ed Storey)

The predecessors of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police lost men in combat during the rebellion in 1885 and 200 members of the former North West Mounted Police enrolled in Canadian contingents, and the South African Constabulary took part in the war of 1899-1902. The Royal North West Mounted Police (as it was then called) took part in both world wars and, with more than 100 years of military history behind it, the RCMP (renamed in 1949) was given the honour of providing and escorting their horse-drawn gun carriage for the procession to the Hall of Honour in the Parliament Building. (Ed Storey)

'As the remains of the Unknown Soldier will lie in state in the Parliament Buildings, a vigil will be mounted and manned 24 hours a day for the entire time. The tradition of the vigil dates back many years. It was originally mounted as a security measure to protect the deceased's worldy possessions. It has evolved to become more of a ceremonial function to demonstrate a show of respect for the deceased. The vigil for the Unknown Soldier will be organized into two main groups. The inner group (The Vigil) will comprise the vigil proper. It includes four sentinels, the sentinel in waiting, and the vigil commander. The outer group (The Vigil Support) will comprise the religious and logistical support required. The vigil will be mounted, commanded, and supplied by serving members of the Canadian Forces and Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The vigil will be mounted immediately upon arrival of the remains at the Hall of Honour and maintained until the removal of the remains for interment. There will be four sentinels posted at the four corners of the casket, and there will be a sentinel in waiting positioned to react if required. An Officer, Warrant Officer, or senior NCO of the Canadian Forces will command each vigil. The period designated for the vigil is divided into four-hour blocks of time. Each shift comprises a commander, a second-in-command and 15 sentinels. The sentinels will be further divided into three groups of five sentinels each. The groups will rotate through the manning at 30-minute intervals. The commander is responsible to change the sentinels and ensure that the vigil is maintained at all times during their designated period of vigil. The vigil will be armed: Officers will carry a sword and Non-Commissioned Members will be armed with a C7 rifle. All will be properly dressed in No. 1 order of dress or equivalent for the RCMP. The vigil will be prepared to be mounted as of 1600 hours 25 May 2000 and maintained until 2000 hours 28 May 2000.'

Left: **May 28 — the open tomb in front of the National War Memorial. (Ed Storey)** *Above:* **Reversed arms were first thought to have been incorporated at the funeral of the Duke of Marlborough in 1722 following a tradition which dates back at least to the Middle Ages.**

On the afternoon of Sunday, May 28, the casket was carried from the Hall and placed on a gun carriage provided by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for the journey from Parliament Hill to the National War Memorial. The funeral cortege included Adrienne Clarkson, Governor General of Canada, and Jean Chrétien, Prime Minister of Canada, veterans, Canadian Forces personnel and members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

When he left his family more than 80 years before, never could this young Canadian soldier have dreamed that his homecoming would be surrounded with so much reverence and ceremonial . . . and that to him alone would fall the unique honour to lie forever in a specially-designed sarcophagus as Canada's Unknown Soldier.

Right: **The casket is lowered before being covered with soil from France and each of the Provinces and Territories of Canada. (Ed Storey)** *Below:* **June 12, 2000. The sealed tomb — the bronze sword, laurel and maple elements being copied from those on the altar of the Vimy Ridge Memorial. (Ed Storey)**

THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION AND TRIESTE

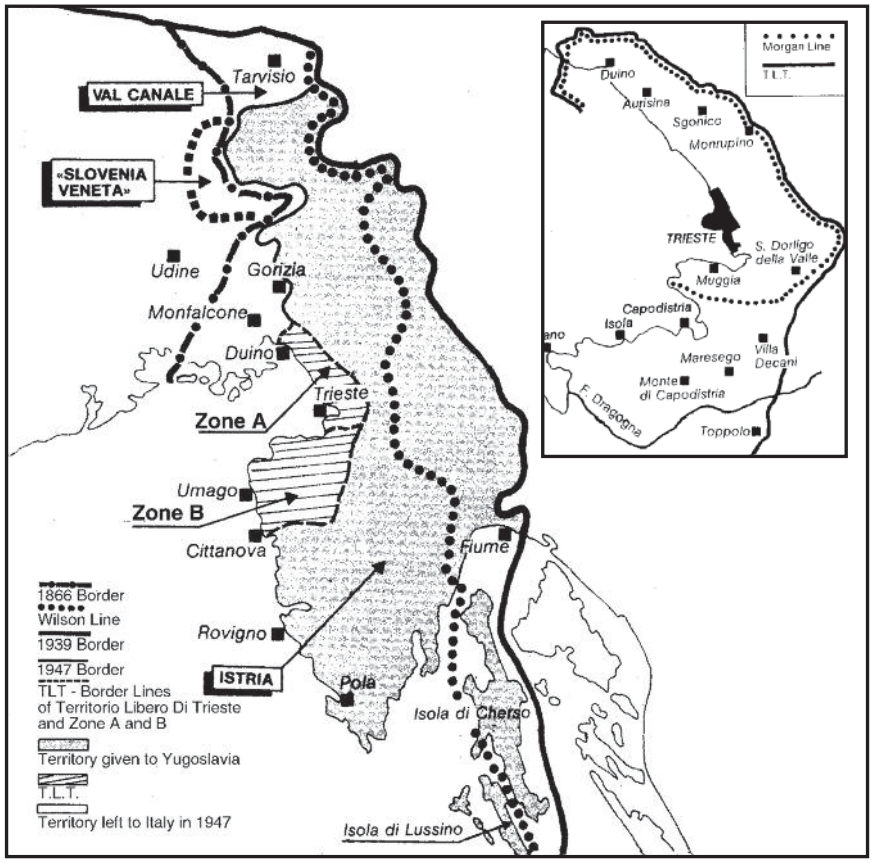
By Jeffrey Plowman, Riccardo Cignini and Daniele Guglielmi

'Under clouded skies which belied the date — it was late afternoon on May 1, 1945 — the armoured cars found the long tarmac sweep of Route 14 completely deserted. No road-block, no crater checked them as they raced forward at 35 miles an hour, their wireless masts swaying like saplings, their tyres sizzling on the wet road surface, their commanders upright in the turrets, earphones over their soft black berets. Ahead to the east were the skeleton-grey, rock-strewn slopes of the Carso; beyond, climbing into the rain clouds, the mountains of Slovenia. Near at hand, hidden by the trees in the fields, must be the bed of the Isonzo river. Yes, there it was — and there, undamaged, was the great white concrete bridge that carried the road to Trieste, 20 miles farther east. Partisans with rifles and red scarves waved to them from a building near the riverside. The waters in the wide shingle bed gave back the drab grey of the skies.

'The bridge was mined. Explosive, packed under the central arch and dug into the roadway, could be seen easily. The cars swung their machine guns to cover the far bank as the sappers went forward, and removed the detonators. Then the cars moved on again, over the bridge, over the Isonzo, into Venezia Giulia. The roadside houses grew more frequent, until they formed a suburban street, over which the great cranes of the Monfalcone shipyards showed up to the south-east. More partisans, each with some red badge or scrap of red clothing to mark his faith, stared at them and waved. At last, by the roadside, they saw two men in more formal uniform — khaki jackets, Sam Browne belts, fore-and-aft caps. The cars pulled up. The leading troops of the British 12th Lancers, acting as the cavalry screen for the 2nd New Zealand Division of the Eighth Army, had contacted troops of Marshal Tito's National Army of Liberation in Ronchi dei Legionari, just inside the borders of Venezia Giulia. In the Mediterranean Zone, the Balkan and the Italian fronts had merged.'

Top: **Tanks of the 2nd New Zealand Division passing through Monfalcone to a warm welcome from the local population. This photograph was actually taken on May 3, 1945. (Alexander Turnbull Library)** *Above:* **A comparatively quiet day in the Piazza del Republica in Monfalcone. The buildings around the square have changed little though there are some alterations to the skyline.**

Trieste, facing Venice at the northern extremity of the Adriatic, has had a colourful history. First developed as a port by the Romans as part of the province of Istria, it was given its independence by the King of Italy in 948 but was captured by the Venetians in 1202. A century later saw it under the protection of Austria, a situation which gradually led to its actual possession by the Austro-Hungarian Empire as an imperial free port. However, Italy had long coveted Trieste for itself and it was occupied by Italian troops in 1918 as part of the Treaty of London drawn up in secret between Britain, France and Russia in 1915. German forces seized it in 1943 to serve as a key southern port for the Greater German Reich but in 1945 it was occupied by Marshal Tito's Yugoslav troops. The peace treaty signed with Italy in 1947 split the 'Free Territory of Trieste' into two zones: Zone A administered by Britain and the United States and Zone B by the Yugoslavs. However the partition arrangements proved unworkable and Trieste became one of the world's hot spots, constantly in the news in the late 1940s. A long series of negotiations led in 1954 to the passing of part of Zone A and Zone B (over 200 square miles in total) to Yugoslavia while the city of Trieste and the remaining 91 square miles of Zone A went to Italy. Trieste's unique status as a 'free port' was guaranteed and in 1963 the city became the capital of the new autonomous region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The map shows the boundary as it was in 1939, our story recounting the race for the city in May 1945.



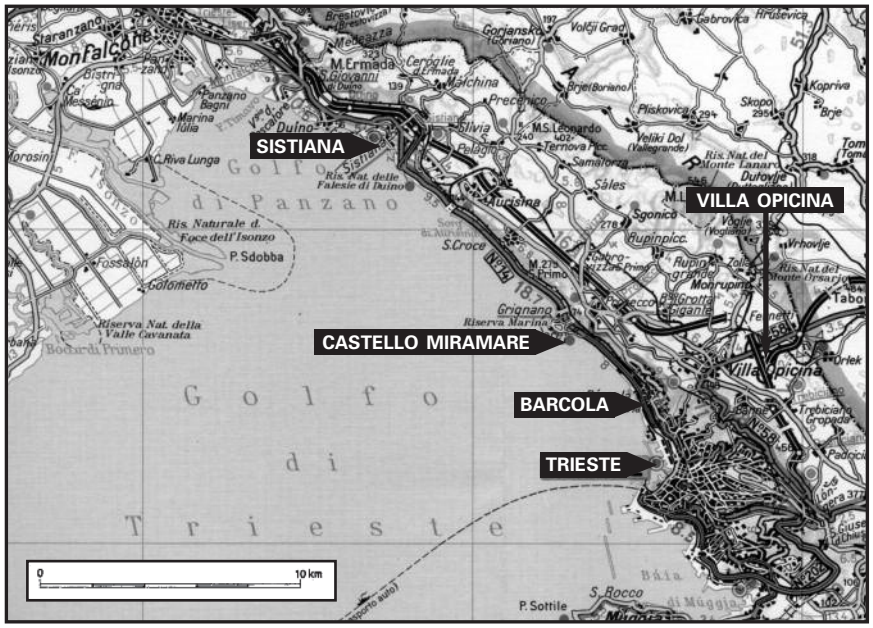
This is how Sir Geoffrey Cox described the first meeting of the Allied and Yugoslav armies in Italy in his book *The Race for Trieste.* Behind the 12th Lancers, the 2nd New Zealand Division was following up in a great column of trucks and tanks back over the Isonzo and round the coast past Venice. Since crossing the Po river on April 25, 1945, they had advanced rapidly, too rapidly as it turned out, for the Yugoslavs who showed all the signs of being caught unprepared for their arrival. As General Bernard Freyberg, commander of the New Zealand Division, was later to comment: 'What we did not know was that Tito had determined to get to the line of the Isonzo before us and present us with a fait accompli. The first day we crossed [the Isonzo] we caught him unprepared, however, he had not even blown or picketed the bridge over the river . . .'

After pushing on through the shipbuilding town of Monfalcone and occupying the high ground to the east, the division halted. General Freyberg met with the Yugoslav officers whom the 12th Lancers had first come in contact with after their arrival earlier that afternoon. Here he offered them the alternative that the New Zealand Division could push on towards Trieste, or halt here and discuss future plans with the Yugoslav commanders. Not surprisingly, the Yugoslavs were strongly in favour of the latter and offered to return to their headquarters and bring their area commander for a conference that evening. When that failed to eventuate as did another arranged for 8.30 a.m. the following morning, Freyberg returned to his headquarters and directed the 9th NZ Brigade to continue the advance to Trieste.

Just who got to Trieste first has always been a bone of contention and that is just on the New Zealand side. The problem is that the division did not enter the city in one continuous column, but in scattered groups throughout the afternoon of May 2. Thus, from the perspective of the individuals within these groups, they were first there because they saw no others. This makes it difficult to determine who exactly was first and it may never be possible now to resolve this, such is the degree to which these views are held in some quarters. However, what can be done is to present the viewpoints of the two most likely contenders and leave it open for further discussion.

The Yugoslavs, of course, have always maintained that they had entered the outer suburbs as early as April 30, and that by the following afternoon some of their armour had penetrated as far as the waterfront and shot up a number of ships in the harbour. Some of the New Zealanders who were first in would dispute this as they claim to have seen little sign of any Yugoslavs until after they had penetrated right to the centre of Trieste. Whatever the true situation, aerial reconnaissance that morning revealed only empty streets in Trieste, though there were some signs that fighting had taken place.

Left: **Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh Robinson (commanding 20th Armoured Regiment), Captain Spillman and Major Rod Eastgate (OC HQ Squadron) taking a break during the drive along the coast road. Castello Miramare is on the promontary of land to the right of the tunnel, suggesting that this photograph was taken during the surrender negotiations with its garrison.** *Right:* **The coastal road is narrow and busy and this was the best/safest comparison we could obtain.**



Route taken by C Squadron of the 19th Armoured which contests the claim of the 20th to be the first in Trieste, on May 2.

firing pedal, set off the co-axial machine gun and, to the delight of the crew, they were able to watch as the infantry deployed from the truck in perfect formation. Overtaking the truck they drove along the waterfront and into the centre of town.

On reaching Piazza Oberdan, the force divided, one tank proceeding straight ahead with the next peeling off to the left and so on down the line. While some of them made for the Palazzo de Giustizia (Palace of Justice or the Tribunale), the rest headed further east through the town. Finding no sign of life, they eventually, under orders, retraced their steps to the Palazzo de Giustizia. All this time their fellow tanks back there, waiting for reinforcements and faced with a strong force of SS troops inside, had taken up positions in the streets outside. They claim that at least one attempt was made to communicate with those inside by someone from one of the tanks but the Germans had indicated that they were unwilling to surrender to anyone other than Freyberg.

19TH ARMOURED REGIMENT

On the New Zealand side, both the 19th and 20th Armoured Regiments contest the honour of being the first armoured units into that city and, while official accounts favour the latter, they also acknowledge that a number of tanks from the 19th Armoured Regiment were on hand when the final shots were fired. Just how they got there has never been explained, especially given that they crossed the Po and Adige rivers some two days after the 20th Armoured. Nevertheless, by May 2, C Squadron, 19th Armoured Regiment, had reached Sistiana from where they radioed in and received orders to proceed to Trieste.

At Sistiana the main road divides, one route following the coast and one going over the hills to Villa Opicina while in between, another runs above the coast road for a while before rejoining it at Barcola, just out of Trieste. It was this road that 19th Armoured Regiment's C Squadron took that day, largely on the advice of some patrons of a wine bar in Monfalcone that they had talked to the previous evening. It proved to be good advice and, by the early afternoon, they found themselves in Barcola, on the coast road again, where they ran into some Yugoslav soldiers who tried to tell them that they had taken Trieste and there was no need to go any further. The Yugoslavs were in no position to argue with ten tanks so eventually the squadron pushed on and around 2 p.m. (according to the diary of one of their number) they reached a tunnel where they halted again, this time over concern that it might be defended. It was at that point that a truck-load of 22nd Battalion soldiers appeared and drove straight into the tunnel. Needing no further encouragement, the tanks took off in hot pursuit. Fortunately the commander of the lead tank had taken the good measure to elevate the gun as, on the other side, the quiet deserted streets unnerved its gunner. His foot slipped on the

Indicative of the confusion that reigned on that day is this photograph of a T34/76 (under new management) and foliage-draped SdKfz 234/4 armoured car taken by Sergeant Keith Jarman of B Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment, during surrender negotiations with a group of Germans they encountered on the final drive into Trieste. Eventually, they moved off into the city abandoning the Germans to their fate.

Some of the New Zealanders who tried to negotiate the surrender of the German forces around Villa Opicina commented that the Germans had enough firepower to retake Trieste. This knocked-out T34/76 was photographed by Trooper Lex Wilson of 20th Armoured Regiment sometime in May or June 1945 on the road between Trieste and Opicina Barracks. The German 5th Police Tank Company was known to be operating with captured Russian tanks in the area in early 1945, so the tank could well be from that unit.

The Castello Miramare, the home of the Duke of Aosta (the old Roman town which was to become the capital of Valle d'Aosta in 1945), was now a German strong point, guarded by 600 troops and protected by gun emplacements. Here the 20th Armoured halted whle the defences were attacked by aircraft.

through. At a second road-block, the Germans waved surrender leaflets as they came out of a house but the tanks were ordered to push on and left them to be collected later.

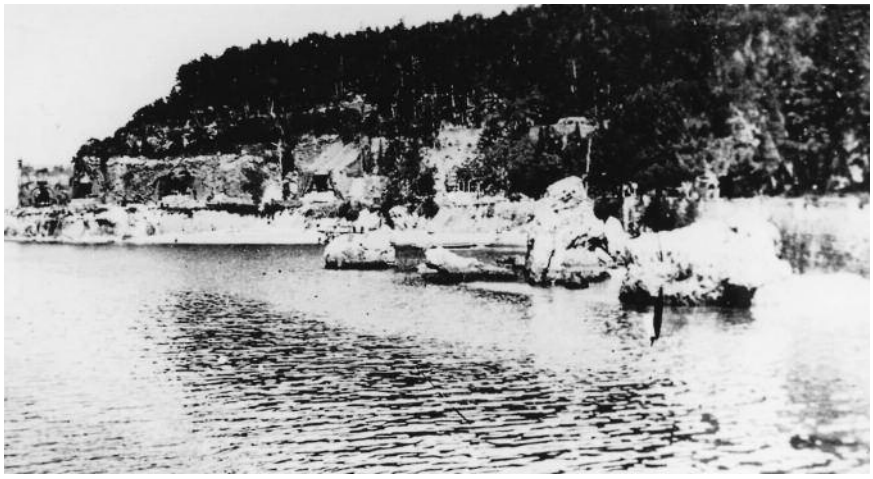
With an Austrian interpreter Lieutenant-Colonel Donald marched across the square toward the Palazzo de Giustizia holding a white handkerchief in the air and demanded to speak to the German commander. Eventually two officers appeared. Donald tried to explain to them that they would give them safe passage if the Germans would surrender but the man he was talking to was drunk, uncompromising and abusive so Donald was forced to retire.

In the meantime, there were still the other garrisons to deal with and the German officers who had accompanied Lieutenant-Colonel Donald had been in constant touch with them. The Germans in the Castello San Giusto were surrounded by Yugoslavs and were in urgent need of assistance. Major Cross was detailed to take his company and a troop of tanks over there and was told that

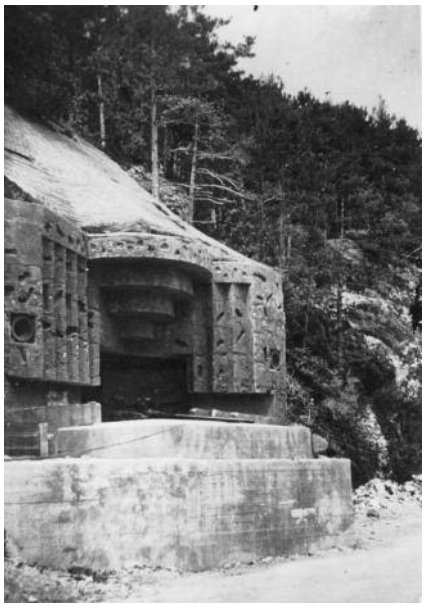
22ND BATTALION

Things did not go as smoothly for 22nd Battalion, supported by B Squadron of the 20th Armoured Regiment. Some opposition was encountered near Sistiana but was soon taken care of and then the tanks took on three enemy boats offshore, setting one on fire and forcing the abandonment of a second, while the third escaped. At around 2.30 p.m. they came within sight of Castello Miramare, on its promontory, defended by a garrison of 600 and supported by 8.8cm guns. Somewhat short of it they halted again while aircraft strafed and bombed the place. Proceeding on they ran into another road-block. Here a German officer approached under a white flag and told Lieutenant-Colonel Haddon Donald of the 22nd Battalion that his commander wanted to surrender. Donald went through the road-block with him in his Jeep, along with two Lancer scout cars, and took the German general's surrender. The Germans were in constant contact with the garrisons in Trieste, all of whom wanted to surrender to the New Zealanders, as they were scared of the treatment they would undoubtedly be meted out at the hands of the Yugoslavs. The general told Donald that the garrison in the Palazzo de Giustizia were a law unto themselves. They would not obey General Hermann Linkenbach, the area commander, and had actually been attacked by German forces but were stubbornly holding out. He then suggested to Donald that General Linkenbach might actually surrender to the New Zealanders if he (Donald) offered him safe passage.

So it was that Lieutenant-Colonel Donald set off for Trieste in his Jeep from Miramare accompanied by the general, the other German officer, complete with their radio, followed by the two scout cars from the Lancers. On reaching the Palazzo de Giustizia they set up their headquarters in a building alongside the square where they could observe the premises and Donald radioed his leading company. Unfortunately, the troops following up had been held up by a road-block that Donald's party had managed to get through unchallenged. At this road-block, as the leading infantry — C Company under Major Lloyd Cross — debussed from their trucks, one of the tanks of B Squadron (20th Armoured Regiment) moved forward and sprayed the pillboxes with its Brownings and then charged straight



This photograph taken in 1945 shows the three gun emplacements on the Trieste side of the Castello Miramare. (A. Fox)



One of the gun emplacements in 1945 . . .

. . . and again in 1999, now well sealed.

Left: **New Zealand and Yugoslav troops mingle outside the Palazzo de Giustizia on the afternoon of the May 2. Some tanks and scout cars of the 20th Armoured Regiment can be seen on the right while, mixed up with the 22nd Battalion trucks on the other side of the piazza, is one of the 12th Lancers' armoured cars. The casual demeanor of the troops belies the situation. At the time the photograph was taken, the building was still occupied and had heavy machine guns at every window.** *Right:* **While the buildings surrounding the square have changed very little, vehicle parking has now gone underground.**

the garrison's commander, Admiral Riegele, was expecting them. Not expecting them and not impressed to see them either were the Yugoslavs who opened fire on the New Zealanders. Unwilling to start a battle with them, Cross radioed back to Donald who went up to Cross's headquarters, appraised the situation and instructed him to send the tanks up the road with one of his platoons on foot sheltering behind them. This they did but, when the first tank appeared in sight of the castle, the Germans fired a bazooka at it but fortunately it missed. The Yugoslavs threatened to shoot anyone who went inside but, when tanks and infantry got to the castle gates, the Germans opened them and they passed safely through. Once inside they accepted the surrender of its garrison of 190 men.

Later that evening, while sharing a meal with their prisoners, Major Cross and his men came under further attention from the Yugoslavs outside who began shooting at any movement within the walls. From time to time, some of them called at the castle gate to demand an entrance but in vain. The German commander now suggested that the New Zealanders hand their weapons back to them so that they could fight alongside each other but Cross tactfully declined that offer. In the morning, the garrison was marched down the road, under escort, to howls of protest from the demonstrating Yugoslavs and civilians.

Back at the Palazzo de Giustizia, New Zealand troops were steadily arriving. While some tanks and trucks parked in the square in full view of the troops inside, others remained in the nearby Piazza Oberdan. By this time, the locals were starting to emerge to greet the Allied troops and the first Yugoslav soldiers started to arrive at the Palazzo de Giustizia. Lieutenant-Colonel Donald made one last attempt to persuade them to surrender, this time taking his adjutant who had some understanding of German. He found them still aggressive and abusive so he told them he would surround their building with tanks and blow it up if they did not surrender. The windows were bristling with machine guns and as they slammed the door in his face he heard safety catches being released.

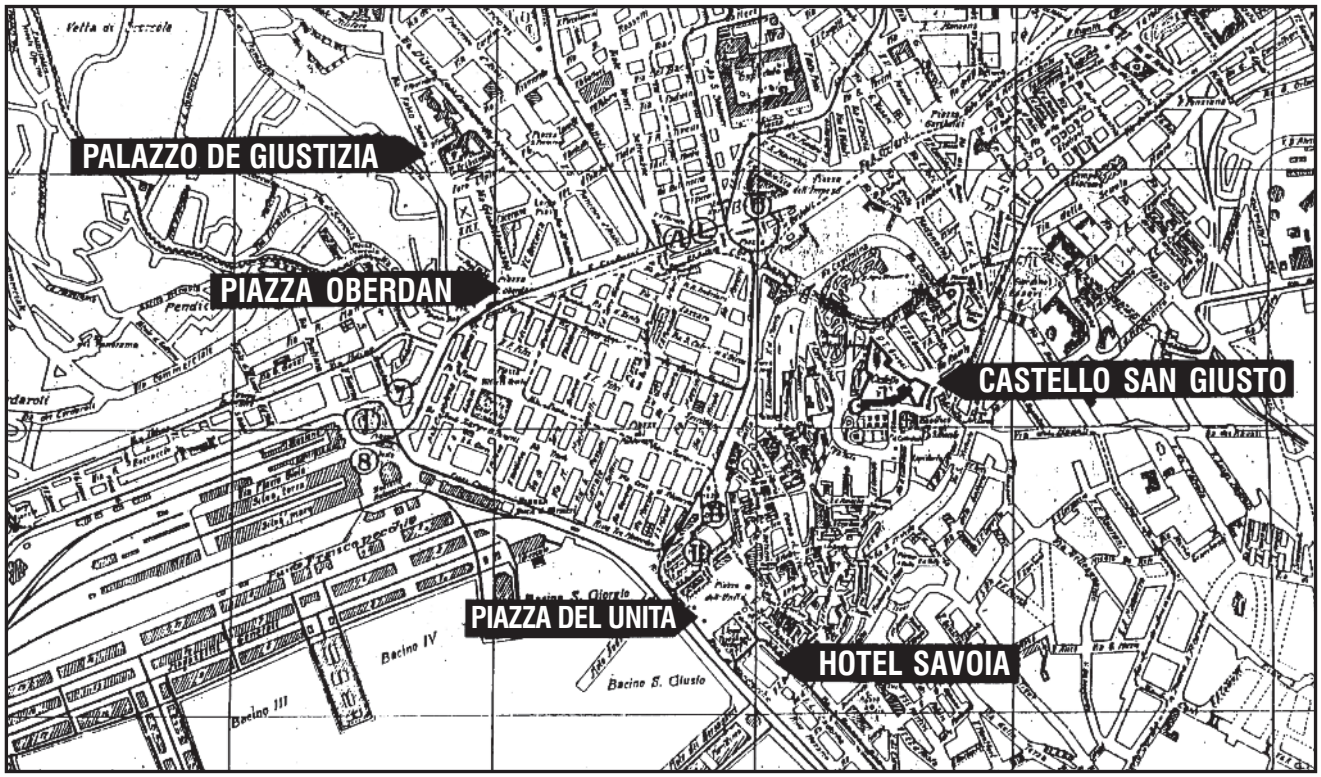
An arrangement was made with the commander of the Yugoslav troops that the New Zealand tanks would bombard the building and they could take the prisoners. In the meantime troops from his own 22nd Battalion were moved out of the square and taken downtown for a meal. The tanks, 18 in all, backed off and commenced firing. After a

The photographer then turned around to capture this shot of two of the 105mm howitzer-equipped Shermans from B Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment. The one commanded by Major Martin Donnelly, OC of the squadron, is on the right.

Captain Frank White from B Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment, photographed the Palazzo de Giustizia after the battle from the Via Giusllniazzo. The building was constructed from stone some three feet thick in places and suffered surprisingly little damage. The only damage visible from this distance is to some of the masonery around the main entrance. In the foreground is an emergency reservoir for Trieste.

short time, it became evident that they were having little effect on the building — its walls were constructed of stone some three feet thick. Lieutenant-Colonel Donald ordered them to concentrate on the doors and windows. Even this took a few minutes to take effect as the range was too close for the sights to be of any use. The tanks continued to fire until they were out of ammunition, and in the evening light their barrels glowed red hot. The Yugoslavs then entered the building and spent the night clearing it out — some of the Germans not emerging until they sobered up.

In retrospect, it may be possible to resolve the two accounts. The description given by the surviving members of C Squadron of the 19th Armoured Regiment indicates that they were among the first arrivals in Trieste, especially given the deserted streets they recall passing through. It is possible that they arrived shortly after Lieutenant-Colonel Donald and his party and maybe even before the leading elements of 22nd Battalion and 20th Armoured Regiment. On this basis then the tanks Donald first saw arriving at the Palazzo de Giustizia may well have been those from C Squadron. Members of the squadron are also adamant that one of their number went over to negotiate with the Germans and this could have happened while Donald's party was at the Castello San Giusto



A lot of the minor damage to the Palazzo de Giustizia was not repaired and the damage to the front face of the building from their tank fire can still be seen.

Left: **A view of the crowd in the Piazza Oberdan from the spare driver's station of one of the tanks of 20th Armoured Regiment.** *Right:* **The tank is gone and so are the crowds. Near where it was parked people wait for a bus to Villa Opicina. The building across the street serves as a home for Italian war veterans and commercial offices.**

THE DIVISIONAL CAVALRY

The inland route proved a little tougher than the coastal route. For support the Divisional Cavalry Battalion had a troop from A Squadron of the 20th Armoured Regiment. At Prosecco, they encountered an enemy road-block backed up by mortars and one of their own 6-pounder anti-tank guns. It had been captured the previous day when its tow vehicle had developed engine trouble. Its crew had set out to rejoin the battalion at dusk but were picked up when they stopped to ask a soldier the way to Trieste only to discover he was German. Fortunately they escaped the next day and two of them were able to give the 12th Lancers some valuable information when they were picked up.

At Villa Opicina the New Zealanders again came under attack from some German infantry backed by two tanks, a self-propelled gun and two 8.8cm guns. The first tank was knocked out by Sergeant Jack Bremner who lobbed a round from a PIAT into it and had the satisfaction of seeing it burst into flames. The second was dealt with by one of the tanks which then turned its attention onto some of the houses nearby. Soon after, their occupants surrendered. Unfortunately it wasn't until 5 p.m. that the Divisional Cavalry were ready to move again and it was not before 6 p.m. that they finally entered Trieste.

THE FINAL SURRENDERS

There were still other German forces waiting to surrender to the New Zealanders and Lieutenant-Colonel Donald's next task was to receive the surrender of General Linkenbach himself. Around midnight, accompanied by his intelligence officer, 2nd Lieutenant Clem Currie, he went up to Linkenbach's headquarters which was in a villa at the top of a hill overlooking Trieste. Linkenbach wanted to formally surrender to General Freyberg so Donald and Currie had to drive him back to Castello Miramare where the general had set up his headquarters. Freyberg did not want to talk to the German so he had to surrender to Donald instead. Currie was then faced with the task of getting the Germans past the Yugoslavs. He had already had to bluff his way past them earlier. In the end, some trucks and escorts were sent up to Linkenbach's headquarters and returned, loaded with some 800 Germans.

The following morning, May 3, a message was received from the commander of the 1,200-strong garrison at Villa Opicina. A Company of 22nd Battalion under Captain Jock Wells was sent along with three tanks from A Squadron of the 20th Armoured Regiment. Along the way, one tank got ditched and, when the trucks could not pass a demolition on the road, the two remaining tanks carried one platoon forward. While the New Zealanders were starting to negotiate a surrender with the Germans, the Yugoslavs opened fire killing one New Zealander and wounding another.

Wells was able to find the Yugoslav command post and, when Lieutenant-Colonel Donald and Major Martin Donnelly of B Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment, arrived with another troop of tanks, they went first to the German HQ and then by scout car to the Yugoslav HQ. Unfortunately negotiations were impossible without the agreement of Marshal Tito and two places were suggested where he might be found. Lieutenant-Colonel Donald went one way and Major Donnelly the other. In the

Later arrivals met with jubilant crowds *(above),* **a picture which turned out to be taken on the Largo Roiano which is just as busy today** *(below).*

Tanks of B Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment, outside their billets on the Via Cicerone, near the Palazzo de Giustizia, after they replaced C Squadron of the 19th Armoured Regiment.

meantime, a Yugoslav liaison officer went down to the 9th New Zealand Brigade HQ and, supposedly, sorted everything out. Reluctant to risk any more casualties, the New Zealanders were ordered back to Trieste. The infantry left first so that by the time Major Donnelly returned he found his crews anxiously awaiting him. As they mounted up, there was a rush by elements of the German troops to clamber onto their tanks. Fortunately any 'incident' was avoided by a German officer, who spoke good English, ordering the Germans off the tanks. As a way of returning the favour, Donnelly pointed out to the German officer that he had seen two Panther tanks back in Opicina. Donnelly suggested to the officer that if he liked to put as many men as he could onto them he could follow the New Zealand tanks back to Trieste, provided he gave them 15 minutes head start. These were the only Germans to escape the pocket and surrender to the New Zealand Division, the rest became Yugoslav prisoners.

THE UNEASY PEACE

If the New Zealanders thought the war was over they were soon to be disappointed. The Yugoslavs had always considered the province of Venezia Giulia theirs and, while they were, momentarily, upset with the sudden appearance of the New Zealand Division in their midst, this did not discourage them from their plans to incorporate the province into the Republic of Yugoslavia. After making their protests about the Allied presence and demanding an immediate withdrawal of all Allied troops across the Isonzo river, they set about taking control of the civil administration of all the towns and cities within the province. Almost at the same time as the New Zealand Division tanks were blasting the SS out of the Palazzo de Giustizia, the Yugoslavs were setting up a civil administration in the Piazza del Unita. In doing so, they naturally chose to recognise the pro-Yugoslav underground movement in the city, while at the same time destroying the pro-Italian one by declaring all their activities illegal; and to hunt out and remove from Trieste all pro-Italian supporters under the guise of seeking pro-Fascists. This was applied to all other towns and cities in Venezia Giulia and, by mid-May, the whole of the western part of the province, that was supposed to have been administered by the Allies, had been organised as a region of the State of Slovenia.

The Allies were somewhat slower to act when it came to Trieste, largely because of divisions within their ranks. As early as the summer of 1944, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had indicated his desire for the Allies to re-establish control on all areas that had been under Italian rule at the outbreak of the war. Unfortunately, this was dependent on the Allies reaching these areas and by Christmas that year, the Allied armies in Italy were bogged down in the Appenines and south of the Senio river. The Americans for their part were less clear about what they wanted for this region, being more focussed on Western Europe and the war against Japan. An additional complication was their ailing president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who died in April 1945. Thus the Allies entered the final campaign in Italy with no clear policy regarding the future of Trieste. In fact, it was not until April 24 that General Sir Harold Alexander, the Allied C-in-C in Italy, sought clear instructions about Trieste and only on the 30th did he issue them to the troops.

Thus, when the New Zealand Division arrived in Trieste, General Freyberg was faced with the immediate problem of whether to recognise the civil administration set up by the Yugoslavs or allow the officers of the Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories (AMGOT) to do so. In the interim, Freyberg decided to accept the Yugoslav civilian administration and notified them of his decision. Thus, with these formalities over, the two sides now settled down to an uneasy peace in Trieste and its surrounding hinterland.

One of the first things the new administration did was to establish a curfew between the hours of 3 p.m. and 10 a.m. All arms were to be surrendered and widespread arrests began, something that the Allies found quite distasteful. This brought a flood of requests for help from the local population and protests about the arrests. The first to be rounded up were the Italian Carabinieri, but patrols reported nightly of groups of men and women being marched off, and it has been estimated that over 2,000 of them never returned to their families. Nor were Allied soldiers immune. When 19th Armoured Regiment were relieved later in May they smuggled out, in a tank, at least one British soldier who had fears for his safety.

On the Allied side, the immediate responsibility for the garrisoning of Trieste fell on Brigadier Bill Gentry and his 9th Brigade, the headquarters of which were set up in the Hotel Savoia on the waterfront. The Divisional Cavalry took over the castle from the 22nd Battalion, who moved to the northern sector, while the 27th Battalion took over the southern sector, including the dock installations. On hand to support them were the 19th and 20th Armoured Regiments, though the latter only stayed until May 5 when they were sent back to support the 6th Brigade at Monfalcone. The rest of the division was spread out along the coast in between. In support of the division was the British 56th Division who were responsible for securing access over the Isonzo river, while the US 91st Division was to take over the territory to the north, including Gorizia and Palmanova. In an effort to provide a more international flavour to the forces in Trieste, one battalion from the 363rd Infantry Regiment of the 91st Division and a battalion of the Scots Guards from 56th Division relieved the Divisional Cavalry Battalion and 27th Battalion respectively on May 6. Despite this apparent force, it was acknowledged that the Allies' hold on Trieste was tenuous and, in the event of hostilities breaking out, the best option was for it to withdraw from the city and the surround-

The empty site across the street from their billets has since been developed.

Above: **Tanks of the 19th Armoured Regiment swamped by jubilant residents of Trieste on May 3. From other photographs from this series it is evident that they are from A Squadron. This photograph was taken on the Riva del Mandracchio outside the Hotel Savoia where Brigadier Bill Gentry set up his headquarters for the 9th Brigade.** *Below:* **Cars now park where the tanks once stood.**

ing area. The Yugoslavs could have easily cut the road in many places between Trieste and Monfalcone and could have sent in large numbers of troops into the city itself.

The Italians sometimes referred to the New Zealand Division as 'L'Armata senza armi' (the army without weapons) because of a habit New Zealanders had of not carrying weapons while on leave. This was a lesson they soon had to unlearn, though Trieste was hardly a leave situation. Armed parties of Yugoslavs soon took to patrolling the streets, forcing the New Zealanders to carry weapons and move about in larger groups. Road-blocks were set up around the city, often in places near to where Allied units were billeted. C Squadron of the 19th Armoured Regiment, who were occupying the flats across the piazza from the Palazzo de Giustizia, soon found a Yugoslav road-block down the road was backed up by one of their Stuart tanks, its turret trained on their own Shermans parked on the Via Cicerone. Eventually they had no choice but to re-position one of their own tanks, its gun facing the Yugoslavs, and man it at all times. This scene was repeated all over town.

General Freyberg stressed the need to 'establish a very firm touch with the various branches of the community'. He suggested that games of soccer be arranged with the Yugoslav Army or anything else that might ease the tension and while this was done it was generally felt among the Allies that they never really got to know their opposites in the Yugoslav forces. In fact, two deserters from the Yugoslav Army reportedly told the New Zealand Divisional Headquarters that they had been ordered not to talk to Allied soldiers 'because we might have to fight you'. If anything the New Zealanders seemed to get on better with their former German adversaries. The Germans, interned in various camps in the area, provided a ready source of labour for all manner of small jobs and it was not unheard of for the New Zealanders to bring them a few drinks afterwards and then to return them to their camps in a somewhat inebriated state. The British officer in charge of one camp reportedly refused to allow any New Zealanders to borrow any more of his 'charges' after they had to carry or support the Germans back to their barracks following one such session.

Around May 20, as negotiations reached a delicate stage, a crisis of sorts started to develop in Trieste. The Allies had recently sent Tito a strongly worded note that he was to pull back behind the agreed line of demarcation known as the Morgan Line, (named after Lieutenant-General William Morgan, Field Marshal Alexander's Chief-of-Staff in Belgrade). In response, the Yugoslavs began moving troops into the city itself and the Allies were forced to follow suit. The Divisional Cavalry Battalion was moved back in and took over responsibility for the protection of the 9th Brigade Headquarters in the Hotel Savoia, while the 27th Battalion took over the Castello San Giusto. With tension rising in the city, the New

Corporal Des Tomkies from the 19th Armoured Regiment took this photograph from the Hotel Savoia, showing the line-up of B Squadron tanks in front of the Stazione Marittima, sometime after the crisis on May 21, 1945. The T34/85 tanks of the 2nd

Yugoslav Tank Brigade were parked on the other side of the trees in the photograph and the skid marks on the tarmac are thought to have been made by them as they left in the early hours of the morning.

Above: **The Hotel Savoia from the Stazione Marittima during the time the 24th Battalion was in residence . . . and today** *(right)*.

Zealand troops were told that, in the event of no solution being reached in the talks with Tito, there was no way they could instigate an orderly retreat from the city. Instead, the troops were instructed to make their own way out as best they could. In the meantime, the troops were deployed around the Hotel Savoia, the wharf area and other strategic points in the city. In turn the Yugoslavs did the same. To bolster the position of the Divisional Cavalry, B Squadron of the 19th Armoured Regiment was ordered to move from its billets in the city itself to the waterfront opposite the Savoia. The crews were simply told that this move was being made over concern that they were at risk from rifle and sniper fire from the buildings and from grenades being dropped into the turrets of the tanks. This provoked quite an interesting reaction from the Yugoslavs. Later that evening, a column of approximately 25 T34/85 tanks from the 2nd Yugoslav Tank Brigade drove into the city from the east and along the waterfront to the Hotel Savoia. Here they pulled up in front of the tanks of 19th Armoured Regiment. Powerful as the tanks looked, the New Zealanders were soon able to relax a little when it became obvious that the Yugoslavs were relatively unfamiliar with their mounts and were having trouble manoeuvring them into position. After spending several hours outside the hotel, the Yugoslav tanks eventually drove off and left Trieste.

Ironically, that very same day Tito yielded and agreed to accept AMGOT control on the basis of the proposed demarcation line. The next day, May 22, in order to follow up on their success, the Allies decided to ease forward to the Morgan Line, moving through Yugoslav-held positions as they did so. The 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade supported by the 20th Armoured Regiment occupied some scrub-covered hills a few miles from Trieste, illiciting no response from the Yugoslavs. Elsewhere, other Allied formations moved forward also. There were some protests from the Yugoslavs in the wake of these movements and they threatened to set up road-blocks behind the forward British positions, in an area they wished to use as a communications centre, but eventually they agreed that both their and British troops could remain where they were until orders were received from a higher authority. Likewise, in the area held by the New Zealand Division both groups remained. Despite this, many road-blocks appeared in the approaches to Trieste where the Yugoslav sentries demanded both Yugoslav and New Zealand signatures of authority for vehicles to pass. This did not always work. At one such barricade, a New Zealand tank simply pushed past the barrier and left the sentries to clear the remains off the road.

The Yugoslavs still controlled Villa Opicina in strength as a patrol from 23rd Battalion found out while reconnoitring towards Trieste. When they tried to advance further, permission was refused. The Yugoslavs then set up a road-block on the Prosecco — Villa Opicina road and, in retaliation, the Maori Battalion set up a traffic post on the same road. When a Yugoslav car travelling towards Villa Opicina failed to stop, one of the Maori sentries fired his Bren gun into a rear tyre. The irate officer was then escorted to battalion headquarters where he was told that he was at fault in not obeying the traffic rules and then allowed to proceed on his way.

On June 1, 6th Brigade, supported by the 20th Armoured Regiment, replaced the 9th Brigade in Trieste. Even then the situation was still tense and contingency plans were drawn up to meet all eventualities. Fortunately they were never needed. On June 9, the Yugoslav Government signed an agreement accepting the Allies' requirements for the withdrawal of all Yugoslav troops to east of the Morgan Line by 10 a.m. on June 12. They began pulling out from Trieste and other places as far back as the Isonzo river on the morning of the 11th and continued through the next night. In the process, they stripped machinery and accessories from garages and emptied some barracks, hotels and houses of their contents. The only limit to what they took was the paucity of their transport. By the morning of the 12th they were gone, leaving jubilant crowds of Italians in their wake. The Allied troops followed them up to the Morgan Line and even then there were problems. On the Muggia peninsula, south of Trieste, the 23rd Battalion was involved in a dispute over the exact location of the Morgan Line. The Yugoslavs set up road-blocks behind some of the New Zealand positions, temporarily severing their communications. Fortunately it was all sorted out a few days later. Following the

At the best of times, it was always necessary to station a few tanks near the Stazione Marittima. These ones were there during the 24th Battalion's time of occupation.

The Stazione Marittima has altered little from 1945, though the building in front of it appears to have been removed.

For a time the Divisional Cavalry HQ occupied this building *(left)* **in Barcola . . . which turned out to be the Canottieri Nettuno on the coast near a small boat harbour** *(right)*.

cessation of hostilities, the 2nd New Zealand Division did not stay long itself. The first unit to move was the 9th Brigade, departing on July 22 for central Italy. The other formations followed, the last leaving on the 31st. The only New Zealanders to remain were a party of men from 18th, 19th and 20th Armoured Regiments and 28th Assault Squadron at Opicina Barracks, together with a quantity of tanks and armoured vehicles for the training of an armoured force for possible deployment in Asia or the Pacific against Japan. With the cessation of hostilities there, the tanks were railed to Bologna at the end of August and the men departed soon after. Thus ended the association of the New Zealanders with the people of Trieste.

This research has been something of a trans-national effort. While I had been able to locate many of the photographs during interviews I have been conducting with New Zealand returned servicemen, visiting Italy to obtain the comparisons was not an option for me. Thus I was fortunate to be able to get in contact with Daniele Guglielmi through the Internet and he was able to arrange for Riccardo Cignini to obtain the comparisons and to provide me with the necessary translations. Obtaining the comparisons was not difficult, though time consuming as some of the locations were outside Trieste. One thing that was apparent is that despite the appearance of some modern buildings in the city, the areas photographed by the New Zealanders have changed little since the war. Liberated, as it was, so close to the end of the war, Trieste suffered very little in the way of damage. The Allied Air Force did bomb the docks fairly late but the main part of the city seems to have escaped relatively unscathed. New Zealanders arriving in Trieste in May have commented that a lot of the trees in the city appeared to have been cut down for firewood but today when we conducted our survey many of the trees appeared to be newer or higher — this was particularly notable around the Castello San Giusto. Former New Zealand soldiers returning to Trieste after the war have commented that they could still see their handiwork on the walls of the Palazzo de Giustizia and this is certainly evident from the photographs — the entire front face is pock-marked where it was struck by bullets (and sometimes shells) during that final 20 minutes. The only thing that appears to have changed

On a 'molo' (mole) beyond the Canottieri Nettuno is a small bunker. It has been put to good use today by the 'Friends of the Bunker' selling ice creams and soft drinks.

Below left: **The Castello San Giusto during the period it was occupied by the Divisional Cavalry.** *Below right:* **The walls, once bare, now have an extensive cover of vines.**

Above: **Yugoslav troops in the Piazza del Unita the day they left Trieste . . . and the jubilant Italian crowds filling the square afterwards** *(right).*

is the square itself: lawns have replaced the paving stones and there are now underground parking facilities where the tanks once parked. Likewise the waterfront by the Hotel Savoia and the Piazza del Unita has altered relatively little. While the gun emplacements at Castello Miramare have been sealed off it is interesting to see a bunker at Barcola being put to good use selling ice creams and drinks.

The Triestini (inhabitants of Trieste) know and remember the New Zealanders well and we are grateful to them for their help and support during the search for the comparisons. In particular we wish to thank Antonio Zucchero from the reception of the Hotel Savoia for allowing us to take photographs of the waterfront from one of the upstairs rooms. Likewise in Monfalcone we are grateful to Giancarlo Pelosi of the Studio di Architettura Arch. for his help. Our grateful thanks are also extended to the following veterans: Sir Geoffrey Cox, Haddon Donald, Frank Harvey, Jack Cummins and the late Martin Donnelly.

Below: **The piazza has changed little since then. The building in the background houses the mayor's office and the city council.**

The volcanic island of Bora Bora in the South Pacific — one of those tropical paradises untouched by western civilisation — in 1942 experienced a rapid introduction to modernity when the United States decided to make it a staging post on the line of communication between the US and Australia. The base's airstrip was on the island of Motu Mute, in the foreground.

BORA BORA — WWII IN PARADISE

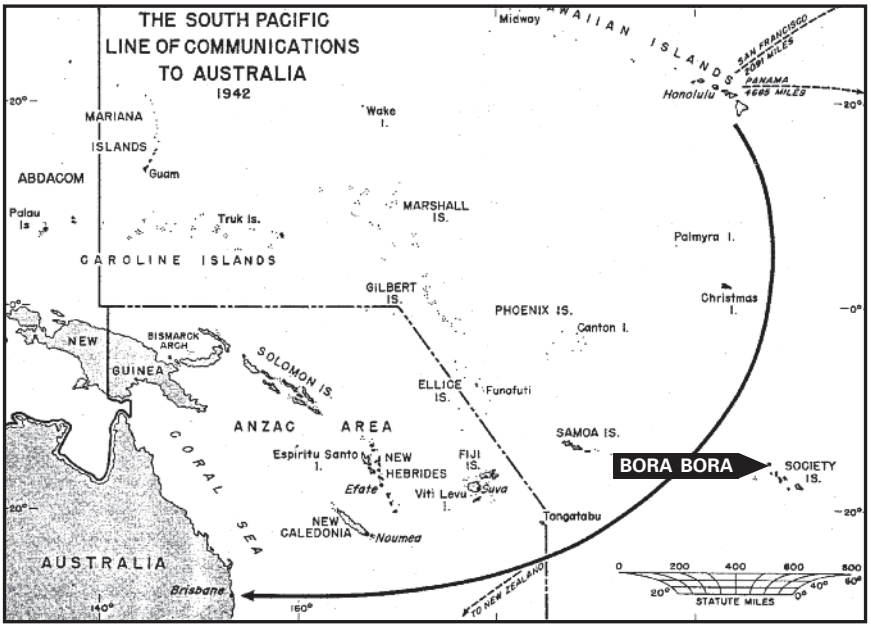
By Raymond E. Charlton

Bora Bora is a small, beautiful island, set in the South Pacific, specifically French Polynesia. A member of the Society Islands, it is thought by many people (myself included) to be the best example of a tropical island paradise. It is located 2,700 miles south of Hawaii and 5,200 miles west of Panama. The Society Islands consist of the Windward Islands — Tahiti and Moorea — to the east, while to the west are the Leeward Islands: Raiatea, Tahaa, Huahine, Bora Bora and Maupiti. Tahiti is the centre of government and commerce for the entire island group.

Having heard of Bora Bora as the most beautiful island in the world, I had always wanted to visit there and finally got the opportunity to do so in January 1991. I was aware that the US military had been all over the South Pacific during WWII but I was surprised to learn they had had such a large presence on Bora Bora and that they had so radically changed the island during their stay. I resolved to research this subject at home and to return to Bora Bora to investigate further.

With one bold stroke, on December 7, 1941, Japan declared war on the United States and in doing so, seized the initiative in the Pacific. Guam and Wake Island had been captured, the Philippines and Singapore were under siege, the Japanese had invaded the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) and the British had lost Hong Kong. The Japanese seemed unstoppable and it was obvious that they had designs on Australia and New Zealand. Keeping an open line of communication between these two allies and the United States was an obvious strategic imperative. The northern route across the Pacific south-west from Hawaii was under Japanese control, thus leaving only the southern route via the South Sea islands.

Since 1935, the US military had been making contingency plans for bases in the Pacific where the Navy could concentrate its strength in case hostilities would break out between the US and Japan. As its chief offensive task in the Pacific, early plans called for the Navy to capture and establish control of the Marshall and Caroline Islands and surrounding areas and to establish an advanced fleet base on Truk. These plans projected this would be completed six months after the outbreak of war. It was expected that a Japanese offensive would be contained within the western Pacific and the newly established base facilities in the South



Bora Bora forms part of the Society Islands. Other US bases set up on the air and sea route from Hawaii to Australia were Palmyra, Christmas, Canton and Samoa.

Right: **The dock at Vaitape, the main village on the island, pictured soon after the arrival of the US forces in February 1942. Made of coral and earth, it was only wide enough for one vehicle at a time. Note the horse-drawn cart in the background. There was more horse-drawn than motorised transport on the island before the advent of the Americans.**

A much larger concrete dock was built by the US Navy's 1st Construction Battalion — the original Seabees — soon after their arrival. Today, this is used by air passengers who are shuttled by boat to and from the airport on nearby Motu Mute.

Pacific would remain secure. The attack on Pearl Harbor immediately transformed the situation. All of this advanced planning was abandoned and it became imperative that the military planners look to the eastern Pacific for the establishment of advanced bases.

On Christmas Day 1941, Admiral Ernest J. King filed a request with the US War Plans Division to 'proceed at once to study the matter of a fuelling base in the central South Pacific area [such as the] Marquesas, Society, or Cook Islands'. Five days later, the War Plans Division recommended that the base be established on Bora Bora in the Society Group which was under the control of the Free French government.

After June 17, 1940, when France capitulated to Germany, the government in Tahiti, as with those in all other French territories, had difficult decisions to make. It had to decide whether to follow the legitimate and constitutional government of Maréchal Henri Pétain, which had negotiated the surrender of France, or should join forces with the rebellious Free French movement which Charles de Gaulle had started in London five days after the surrender. The news from France was confusing and incomplete so after several parleys, the Tahitian populace held a plebiscite and 82 per cent voted to align with the Free French. Thus, the government of French Polynesia was friendly to the US interests in establishing a base there.

On January 3, 1942, preparations for the Bora Bora base began to come together, when the first memo was written to execute Admiral King's order. Five days later, Admirals King and Harold R. Stark and General George C. Marshall signed a seven-page joint Army/Navy basic plan for the occupational defence of the island. 'A fuelling base will be established at Bora Bora by the Navy; the base will be defended by the Army', read the directive. 'The code-name and short title for the base will be "Bobcat".'

The plan these men created stressed the importance of establishing a joint fuel base for Allied vessels and seaplanes at Bora Bora to facilitate the use of shipping routes between the US and Panama to Australia and New Zealand. A complete study of the problems of establishing such a base had never been made. The participants would soon carry out such a study in real life.

The Navy was assigned primary responsibility for the mission to 'construct, administer and operate the Naval Fuel Depot, Seaplane Base, and harbor facilities'. Also, the Navy was to furnish transportation to equip the base, to provide subsistence en route and to supply the main defensive weapons which would consist of eight 7-inch guns and their ammunition. The Army was to furnish standard equipment for its units, ordnance (except the 7-inch guns) and ammunition and sustenance ashore for all personnel. Supplies and maintenance material were to be provided for both the Army and Navy on the island, originally as a 60-day supply, and later increased and maintained as a 90-day supply.

A convoy was planned and immediately organised using ships from various East Coast ports. The convoy's final assembly point would be Charleston, South Carolina. The first part of the convoy was known as 'Baker Tare 200' and consisted of the troop-carrying ships *Santa Elena, Santa Rosa, Barry, Argentina, Island Mail* and *McAndrew.* Warships escorting Baker Tare 200 were the light cruisers and destroyers *Milwaukee, Trenton, Moffett, Sampson, Jarvis* and *Erie.*

The second part of the convoy was known as 'Baker Cast 100' and consisted of six ships which were assigned the task of moving the majority of the men and their equipment to Bobcat. Among them was the cargo ship *Arthur Middleton,* which was the first all-welded vessel made in the United States. Another was the *President Tyler,* which had been used as tramp freighter for the previous ten years and had room for 2,200 men. The rest of the ships in 'Baker Cast 100' were the USS *Alchiba,* scheduled to carry troops and cargo, and the USS *Hamul, Mercury* and *Irene DuPont,* all carrying cargo. The warships escorting this part of the convoy were the light cruisers *Richmond* and *Warrington* and two destroyers.

The men who carried out Operation 'Bobcat' numbered 4,600: 4,385 enlisted men and 215 officers. Of these, 22 officers and 650 men were Navy and of these, eight officers and 250 men formed the 1st Construction Battalion.

The Army forces were made up from the 102nd Infantry, Connecticut National Guard; 198th Field Artillery, Delaware National Guard; 13th Coast Artillery; and the 609th Separate Signal Company (radar), the latter two both Regular Army. The commander of the Army contingent was Colonel (later Brigadier General) Charles D. Y. Ostrom, who, as ranking officer, was designated Island Commander. Because of the suddenness of the call-up, many of the officers and soldiers were in the National Guard with some of them having served in the First World War.

Naval personnel included 78 enlisted men and nine officers from Seaplane Squadron VS2-D14 (later changed to VS-52), equipped with eight OS2U Kingfisher single-engine float aircraft, and 123 enlisted men and six officers assigned to the Fuel Oil Depot.

The 1st Construction Battalion consisted of 138 apprentice seamen, 13 petty officers, 99 rated men and eight civil engineer officers. Its commander was Lieutenant Commander H. M. Sylvester. This battalion is historically significant because these men were the first to be organised for overseas construction duties. There were known initially as 'Bobcats' and later as the 'Seabees'. The 99 rated sailors had been trained as an administrative group headquarters company to function with advanced based civilian construction workers in Iceland and had been diverted from this assignment to Bobcat. The 138 apprentice seamen were from the boot camp at Newport, Rhode Island, untrained for combat or engineering.

The construction and aviation personnel embarked at Quonset, Rhode Island, their transport stopping at Norfolk, Virginia, to pick up anti-submarine boom nets and the 7-inch coastal defense guns. At Charleston, South Carolina, the convoy assembled for redistribution of personnel and loading operations.

At Charleston, the Bobcats were called upon to perform their first construction job. The *Arthur Middleton* transport ship had developed a 12-degree list after the installation of anti-aircraft weaponry on the deck. By using a heavy concrete mix, the Bobcats ballasted the ship back to an even keel. This operation took two days.

The unloading of the ships which brought the men, material and equipment to Bora Bora was beset by many problems, which caused considerable delay. Before proper billets could be erected, new arrivals had to camp in the open. (USNA)

All of the ships had collected at Charleston by the afternoon of January 23. Two of them had come from New York and one from Boston.

The primary purpose of Bobcat was to be a refuelling base, and it was at Charleston that the fuel tanks were loaded aboard ship. The Standard Oil Company of New Jersey designed and provided the bolted steel tanks with the following storage capacities: 200,000 barrel bunker fuel oil (twenty 10,000-barrel bolted tanks), 20,000 barrel diesel oil (two 10,000-barrel bolted tanks), 5,000 barrel aviation gasoline (five 1,000-barrel bolted tanks) and ten 5,000-gallon gasoline tanks which were to be used at the seaplane base.

It was at Charleston that the problems began to arise — problems which would loom large in Operation 'Bobcat'. Men and equipment were pouring into the port from all over the east coast. It should be kept in mind that this was the first joint Army/ Navy operation since the Spanish-American War. Personnel and equipment needs were poorly coordinated between Army and Navy. An example of this was delivery of goods not boxed for shipment and boxed goods which were not marked for contents or destination. Thus, much effort was expended to identify/package/repackage necessary equipment.

Everything needed to be accomplished in the shortest time possible. Fearful of attack by German submarines in US coastal waters, those in charge of the overall planning wanted the convoy to set sail as soon as possible. The stevedores were inexperienced at this type of loading and were not used to working at such a rapid pace, so the Army and Navy personnel were used as labourers to help with the manpower shortage.

A related problem was lack of information and procedures. An example of this caused guns to be loaded in the hold of one of the ships, which were an intended part of the deck armament of this same ship. By the time the error was discovered, it was necessary to unload one railcar load of lumber and 50 tons of general stores to regain access to the weapons.

Because the convoy had taken on cargo and personnel at three different locations (Quonset, Norfolk and Charleston), the stage was set for the largest problem of all to occur which would cause untold grief in the harbour of Bora Bora when the convoy arrived. The original plans directed that material be loaded so that unloading would be 'in order of priority: lighterage [barges], shore defence, fuel tanks, army housing'. As it turned out, this was not an easy order to carry out. The total cargo to be shipped strained the convoy's capacity and, indeed, some material would be left on the docks at departure.

By working around the clock, the Army/Navy personnel were able to finish loading the ships and were able to embark January 25, 1942, and they sailed from Charleston on January 27. In an incredibly short time period of three weeks, Commander Sylvester and the men of Bobcat, lacking any precedence, using skills they didn't know they had, unclear as to who was in charge, had loaded and assembled the convoy, and set sail for Bora Bora, not knowing if the Japanese would be there to meet them.

On February 14, Baker Tare 200 arrived at Bora Bora, with Baker Cast 100 following on the 17th. Both parts of the convoy had transited the Panama Canal and had uneventful passages in the Atlantic/ Caribbean/Pacific areas. The Navy hydrographic ship *Sumner* had preceded the convoy. She reached Bora Bora on January 22, to survey and chart the area, and then to enlarge and straighten the only channel into the deep-water anchorage of the island's lagoon. All the *Sumner* had for reference was a French map of the island from 1886. The convoy had also been preceded by the tanker *Ramapo*. Existing records are not very complete regarding Baker Tare 200. It appears that the ships only carried men and provisions which they unloaded on three beaches and rapidly departed. Baker Cast 100, on the other hand, has very complete records and it was this part of the convoy which remained in the harbour, unloading cargo, for quite some time.

The scene witnessed by the convoy was stunning in its beauty. After sailing through Teavanui Pass, an incredible sight lay before them. The two towering volcanic peaks dominated the scene: Mt Pahia 2,000 feet high and Mt Otemanu almost 2,400 feet high.

Bora Bora is a small island, about 4½ miles long, 4 miles wide, 20 miles in circumference and 14 square miles in area. A steep barrier reef, extending 1 to 3½ miles offshore, completely circles the island. A number of small and medium sized islands called motus are situated along the reef. The largest of these is Toopua. Motus here (except for Toopua) tend to be long and narrow and rise only a few feet above sea level. The most important motu is Motu Mute for reasons which will be explained later. The lagoon, deep on the east side, is fully enclosed by a reef, and the only access is via Teavanui Pass.

At the time of the expedition's arrival, the island's population consisted of approximately 1,200 islanders and less than six French officials representing the government. There was an American couple living on Bora Bora, Hank and Connie Hedges, who had retired from Illinois and moved to the island to get away from civilisation. Hank had worked as an engineer and he was to be helpful in getting the oil storage depot constructed, while Connie was to become a mother figure to many of the home-sick soldiers.

Not long after the anchors of the convoy came crashing down into the bay, two major problems became evident to the Americans. They had thought there would be a steady reliable source of fresh water available to them but this proved not to be the case, as the natives used only rain water and small wells for their needs. The men would have to rely on the ships in the harbour for water until wells could be dug and streams dammed. So the construction of a fresh-water system for the island was added to the project list for Bobcat.

The second problem arose almost immediately upon arrival and was so overwhelming that it almost doomed the mission right at the beginning. After hauling many tons of supplies, weapons, vehicles, and aircraft, almost one quarter of the way around the globe, nothing could be put ashore! The haphazard loading job that had taken place in South Carolina meant that the ships could not be unloaded without the floating equipment (pontoon barges), and these could not be assembled without being unloaded first.

The barges, which were the principal means for moving cargo ship-to-shore, were stored in various holds on various ships, often deep within the holds. Not only were barges not stored near the top of the holds, but in some cases, they were discovered in the holds of ships on which barges were not known to be loaded. In the end, it was two 30-ton tank lighters (barges) stowed on deck which saved the day. Within 24 hours of the convoy's arrival, these barges were in the water and operating. The first 50-ton barge came available three days after the arrival of the convoy, the second six days after, and the third and fourth eight days after. But even three weeks later, the two 100-ton barges had still not been uncovered in the holds.

To make matters worse, tie rods and accessories (known as 'jewelry') to be used to assemble the pontoon barges, had been buried beneath other cargo and were not available when needed, so the first few lighters had to be welded together. Weight-handling equipment (slings and cargo nets) had not been provided, delaying the unloading even more. Three weeks passed before the first crane was located and unloaded. Everyone was learning that improvisation was going to play a major part in the success of Bobcat!

Bora Bora had just two coral piers for unloading cargo, one at Vaitape and the other at Faanui. Both were small and only wide enough for use by one truck at a time. Neither was substantial enough to support a heavy load. Here again, the 30-ton lighters proved their value. These smaller barges could come close into shore and unload on the sloping sections of the beach, eight areas on the two-mile stretch of beach between Vaitape and Faanui being used to deposit cargo.

Once the cargo was put ashore, it was moved off the beach by one of the six bulldozers the convoy brought with them. They also brought two station wagons, ten motorcycles with sidecars, 20 bicycles, five ¾-ton pick-up trucks, ten two-cubic-yard dump trucks, a five-ton hoister-lift truck, two caterpillar track shovels with crane and drag-line attachments, two 10-ton truck cranes and four small cement mixers.

The unloading fiasco still further complicated the work that had to be done on Bora Bora. The men found many of the supplies poorly marked or not marked at all and identification was only possible by breaking into the packing boxes and crates, and then examining the contents.

It was often necessary to stop work on board ship to wait for a barge to be unloaded at the beach or vice-versa. Even when trucks and other equipment were available to transport cargo around the island, the work progressed very slowly because of the small number of barges and boats moving the cargo to shore.

Cargo unloading started February 17 with the *President Tyler* and all the other five ships on February 19. It took ten days to unload the *President Tyler,* three weeks for the *DuPont* and the *Alchiba,* 4½ weeks for the *Middleton,* 6½ for the *Hamul,* and 7½ for the *Mercury.* The *Hamul* and the *Mercury,* carrying 6,200 and 5,551 tons respectively, were the two ships which carried the most cargo of the convoy and took the longest to unload. All the time, the threat of Japanese attack was ever present.

Once supplies were stockpiled ashore, another problem arose. There was only one road on the west side of the island, running along the coast, one lane wide, built on crushed coral and sand, with small bridges and large muddy spots. It was destroyed almost immediately by the 7-ton prime movers (trucks having three axles and ten wheels) which were used to move the supplies inland and around the island. The bridges and culverts were damaged and the road surface was torn up under the weight of this new traffic. Usage of heavy trucks was, at first, reduced and, ultimately, banned from the road to be replaced by smaller vehicles.

Yet still another task confronted the Bobcat's road construction. No proper equipment, such as road graders, had been provided. Only one rock crusher with a 20-ton/hour capacity had been included in the cargo and, although this was run 24 hours a day, it was still barely able to keep up with the demand. The engine to drive the rock crusher was never located, so the Bobcats had to adapt a Chevrolet engine to run it instead.

Above: **To accommodate the 4,600-strong garrison numerous tent camps were built, like this one next to the village church at Vaitape. (USNA)** *Below*: **The open field is now a basketball pitch.**

The primary mission — construction of a fuel storage and ship refuelling facility — had to be postponed while a large portion of the detachment's effort was directed towards improving and maintaining the island's road in a passable condition. The fact that the task force had arrived during Bora Bora's rainy season only worsened conditions.

The need for a reliable water supply was such that work was started within two weeks of landing. The fresh-water supply system would consist of two concrete storage dams, one earth-filled storage dam, four 10,000-barrel and six 500-barrel storage tanks and 11 miles of 4-inch water main piping. This project was completed in six weeks.

When they sailed for Bora Bora in January 1942, the Seabees took what trucks were available, hence the interesting mixture of civilian and military trucks in this 'Bobcat' camp ('Bobcat' was the code-name for the US base on Bora Bora). (USNA)

The Americans mounted eight 7-inch guns on the island. These came from the old battleship USS *Connecticut* which had been scrapped in 1923. Installation of the 28-ton guns was a difficult job, requiring much ingenuity, improvisation, and sweat. Here, one of the barrels is lifted using an A-frame. (US Navy)

As the unloading of the ships was getting sorted out and mountains of material were being deposited on the beaches, the problem of defence of the base grew in importance. The only defence Bobcats had was the weapons of the escort ships anchored in the bay, and they would soon be leaving. Work quickly began on making the island secure.

While the Seabees were setting up living quarters and places for the men to eat, four sites had been chosen to place the 7-inch guns which would comprise the main defence of the island: Point Tuahora (3 o'clock), Point Matira (6 o'clock), Point Pahua (9 o'clock), and Point Tereia (11 o'clock).

The first gun was unloaded on March 10, but getting the guns off the ships was easy compared to what had to be done next. Each gun weighed 28 tons total, the base and barrel each being 14 tons. Preparation of the gun sites involved excavation, clearing brush, leveling ground, pouring concrete foundations and building small walls with lava rock. Much of the initial work had to be done by hand as the first jack hammer was not located in the supplies on the beach until April 1. The guns had to be moved up hills which in some places had 45-degree slopes. The sites on these hills varied from 200 to 500 feet above sea level. Given the top priority these weapons had, many new and unorthodox methods were used to emplace the guns.

In one location, the gun was mounted on wooden skids and hauled up the side of a hill, pulled by two tractors hooked together and going down the other side. In other locations, a road was carved out of the hillside and, using switchbacks, ran from the island road to the hilltop. In each instance, a lot of manpower was required when suitable equipment could not be obtained. A combination of A-frames and jacks were used for the seemingly insurmountable task of getting the gun tubes literally threaded into the needle of the gun base.

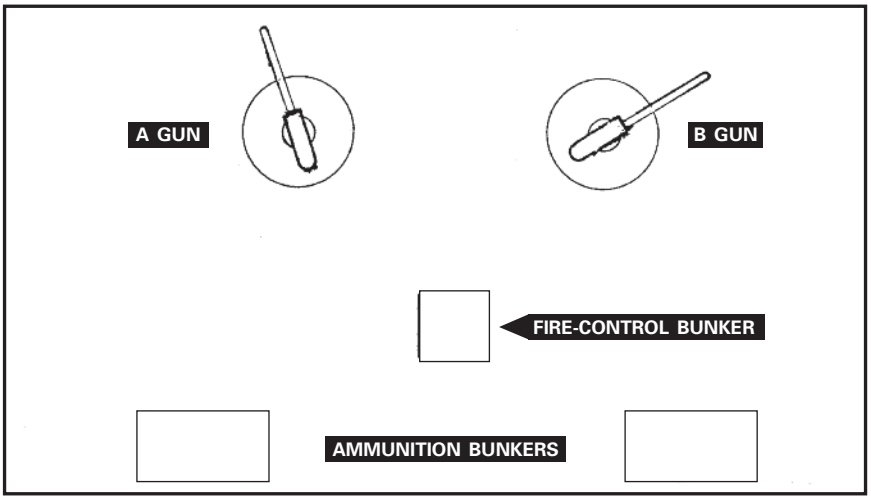
To move the barrels the Seabees used wooden skids and metal pipes for rollers.

The eight guns were installed in pairs in four batteries placed on high ridges at four corners of the island. Moving the barrels uphill was somewhat eased by the fact that much of the vegetation which normally would have covered the hillsides had been stripped away by the hurricane which hit the island in 1939. (US Navy)

Right: **Each battery had the same layout: the two guns were placed side by side and in a forward position, with a fire-control bunker centrally behind them, and two ammo bunkers behind that.**

Gun-site construction first started at Point Pahua on April 5. This was the most important site because it overlooked the entrance to the lagoon. On May 21, the first gun was test-fired for the first time. By June 1, the foundations for all eight guns (two guns per site) had been completed and six guns had been mounted. All four gun-sites were complete by August 1. Each had two small ammunition bunkers, a battery command post and a large searchlight for night-time illumination. There were also two radar stations on the north and south sides of the island.

Below: **The battery at Point Tuahora (at 3 o'clock position), as seen from a helicopter at 1,000ft.**

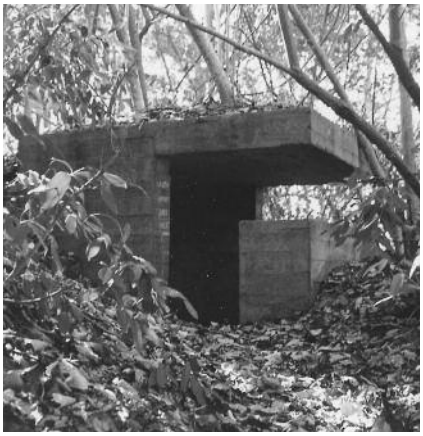


The Tuahora battery is the easiest to visit. Both guns A *(left)* **and B** *(right)* **are still in good condition.**

Point Tuahora's fire-control bunker.

One of the ammunition storage bunkers.

The battery at Point Matira (6 o'clock) is more overgrown. This is Gun A.



The battery's fire-control bunker.

The best-preserved battery is the one at Point Pahua (9 o'clock) which overlooks the island's lagoon. *Left*: **Gun A.** *Above:* **Gun B.** *Below:* **The fire-direction bunker.**

Our author, Ray Charlton, on top of the one gun remaining at Point Tereia (11 o'clock).

Point Tereira's other gun was moved after the war and now rests by the side of the road in Povai village.

Above: **The seaplane base at Tupua, inside the lagoon on the north-western part of the island. The eight OS2U Kingfisher aircraft brought to Bora Bora belonged to Navy Seaplane Squadron VS2-D14, commanded by Captain Jack Roudebush. Commissioned only on January 15, 1942, at Quonset Point, Rhode Island, the squadron had sailed from Charleston on the 24th with its aircraft, plus a six-month supply of spare parts, bombs, ammunition, drummed avgas and depot equipment distributed over four cargo ships. The first assembled Kingfisher flew on March 3. The hangar — a large Quonset hut elevated 2½ feet off the ground — was built a few months later. Once established, the squadron routinely flew three-plane patrols around Bora Bora at dawn and dusk. (USNA)** *Below*: **The site of the seaplane base today.**

The Army had decided to set up their base around Vaitape village, and the Navy at Faanui village and bay. The oil tank farm was located on the hill above the north shore of Faanui Bay. The tanks were elevated should the need arise to refuel ships by using only gravity. This left the seaplane squadron to locate at Tupua.

The seaplane base at Tupua was a totally separate construction project and the sailors of VS2-D14 were pretty much left on their own to accomplish what was needed. With the help of two Seabees, a bulldozer and a length of heavy chain, the coral heads were cleared from the beach. The barges could then deliver the wingless seaplanes from the ships to the shore. The planes were moved around on their beaching gear and dispersed into the coconut grove. The wings were uncrated and bolted into place. The aircraft were depreserved (unwrapped from their protective coverings and coatings and readied for flight) and the first Kingfisher took off on March 3, just two weeks after the convoy had arrived.

On April 11, it was decided some Seabees could be spared from other construction projects to help with seaplane base construction. Work was started on a concrete seaplane ramp, concrete compass calibration rose, and the permanent gasoline storage of ten 5,000-gallon tanks. These tanks were buried in the mountainside just behind the base area and connected by underground pipelines to the refuelling areas near the ramp. An aircraft hangar was constructed using a 40-foot by 100-foot Quonset hut. By the time the base was completed, there was shore parking aprons for 12 planes, one 20-foot by 50-foot steel dugout bomb magazine and 45 Quonset huts which provided living quarters, galley and mess hall.

Right: **The concrete ramp for the seaplanes still exists today.**

As one construction project neared completion, men would be shifted around the island to help on other projects. The road was a constant work-in-progress and would soon circle the island. Work on the fuel oil depot (the reason for Bobcat's existence) did not begin until April 2. Level areas for the fuel tanks had to be blasted out of almost solid rock on a very steep hillside. Adequate construction equipment had not been provided so the Bobcats' ingenuity came into play. The tanks were erected by fashioning a guy derrick from two tubular steel radio masts. By setting up the derrick at the tank's centre, the sides were hoisted into place and bolted in a continuous circle. It took 2-3 days to erect a tank in this fashion. The Army, after some initial reluctance, loaned the Seabees 700 soldiers and 25 officers to help with the fuel tanks. Working around the clock, seven days a week, eight of the 22 tanks had been assembled by June 9. On that same day, a tanker came into the harbour, sea loading connections were made and filling of the tanks from the tanker was begun.

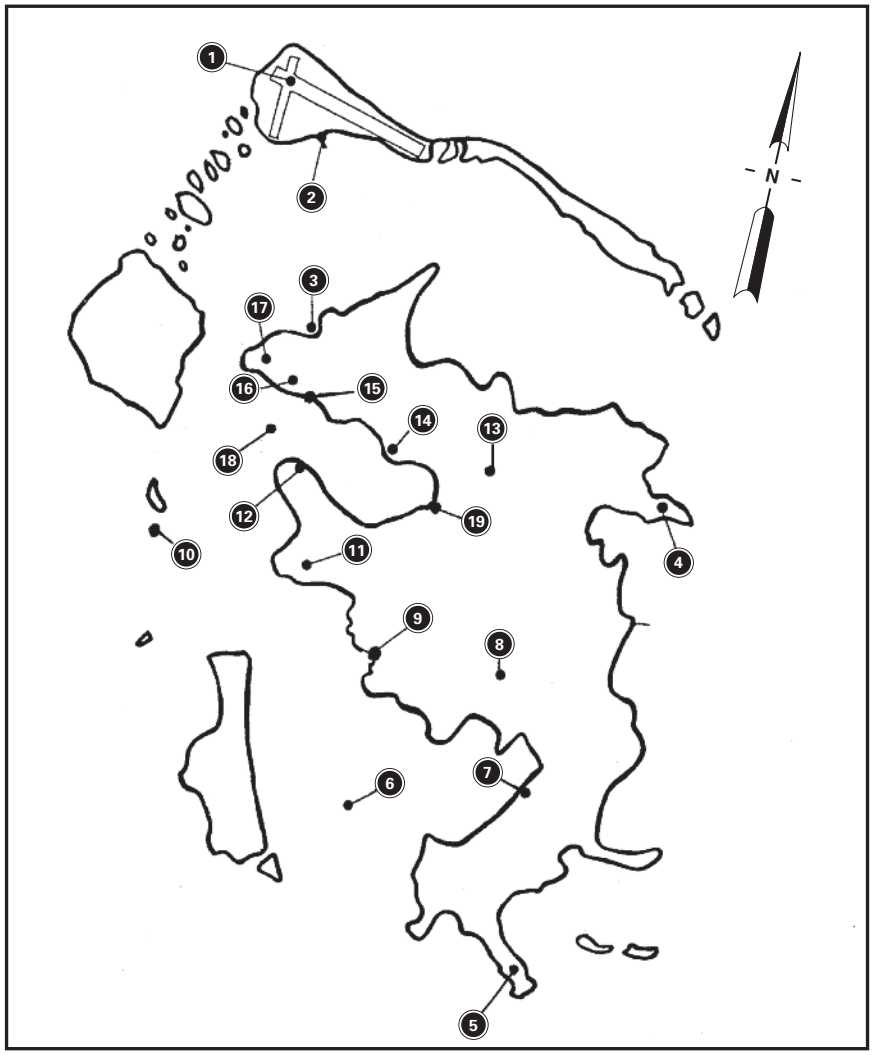
Two cruiser moorings (consisting of three ten-ton anchors lashed together) were placed in Faanui Bay. These moorings were where ships would tie up to take on fuel that was pumped from the storage tanks.

One of the anchors used as cruiser moorings in Faanui Bay, now at Povai.

In the autumn of 1942, the seemingly endless construction projects were coming to a close yet the Army hoped to increase the usefulness of Bobcat by building an airport. Fighter aircraft then could be shipped to Bora Bora, assembled there and island hop to the front. Construction of the air depot was proposed in October. The Army was to provide the necessary equipment and material and the Navy the construction personnel. So another high-priority construction project was started on December 16, but this time, not on Bora Bora, but on Motu Mute, the large, flat island just to the north. Motu Mute was just large enough for the planned 6,000-foot by 400-foot main runway. There would also be a smaller 3,000-foot by 150-foot cross runway. Both runways would be asphalt topped. Work began on a seven-day week/24-hour schedule and the runways were completed in seven weeks, with the first plane landing on March 17, 1943. By April 5, all work connected with the airport had been completed with the addition of a control tower, a steel assembly shop, a radio station and 12 Quonset huts.

No sooner had the airfield been completed when orders were received to cancel construction of the fighter assembly plant. Thereafter, the field was to be used only occasionally by mail and transport aircraft.

The next-to-last project was construction of a permanent wharf for more efficient unloading of cargo. An area was chosen on the south side of Faanui Bay and Landing Number 3 was built. Started in March 1943, and completed in May, the wharf had a face of 430 feet with sheet piling and dirt filling.



A sketch map showing the important sites on Bora Bora. [1] Motu Mute airfield. [2] Motu Mute dock. [3] Tupua seaplane base. [4] Point Tuahora battery (3 o'clock). [5] Point Matira battery (6 o'clock). [6] Povai Bay anchorage area. [7] Seven-inch barrel from Point Tereia and mooring anchors from Faanui Bay. [8] Povai Valley ammo bunkers [9] Vaitape town, dock and church. [10] Teavanui Pass (entrance to lagoon). [11] Point Pahua battery (9 o'clock). [12] Cargo Landing No. 3. [13] Water dams and ammo bunkers at Faanui Valley. [14] Large ammo bunker. [15] Refuelling dock. [16] Oil storage tank. [17] Point Tereia battery (11 o'clock). [18] Faanui Bay anchorage area and cruiser moorings. [19] Faanui town.

And what of the people living on Bora Bora? The natives had had very limited contact with the outside world up to this point. There were several old Ford automobiles in which they could ride when gasoline was available and a radio station which would pass along news and gossip among the other islands including Tahiti.

And then came the 'friendly invasion'. Huge ships filled both bays. Thousands and thousands of men swarmed over the island and changed it forever. The island population had increased by a factor of five. Americans worked on their construction projects around the clock. There were large trucks running up and down, men in constant motion, construction crews setting off blasting charges ashore to build the road and in the bay, removing coral heads that would otherwise hinder navigation. A construction crescendo that never stopped!

The natives were amazed at the speed with which the troops were building their installation. The noise, frantic activity and sheer numbers of people were all rather overwhelming to a people who a short time before had known everyone on the island and had seen few changes in their lifetimes.

The Americans had arranged leases through the French administrators for areas which they wanted to occupy. They took over 169 parcels of land owned by 115 individuals who received a token payment of $1 per year for each lease. Repairs, alterations and additions had to be made with the consent of the owner, albeit they were not in much of a position to argue. The United States agreed that the Navy would provide food for the Bora Bora natives because their normal channels of commerce and communication with other islands would be shut down for security reasons.

The US also agreed to recognise Free French sovereignty on Bora Bora and that the title of the naval base property would remain with the Free French government. All permanent installations such as waterfront facilities and buildings would become property of the French upon expiration of the agreement.

With the many construction projects being accomplished on Bora Bora, the first year was spent getting facilities built and in running order. Only 64 ships came through Bora Bora between June 1, 1941 and January 1, 1943. Some of these ships unloaded cargo, but most were refuelled and sent westward. It was in 1943 that Bobcat began to be used as originally intended. In that year, 181 vessels were refuelled; 193 were given water

Remains of the refuelling wharf on the north shore of Faanui Bay.

(although fresh-water replenishment for passing ships was never included in the plans for Bobcat); repairs were made to 45 vessels, including 10 major repair jobs; and approximately 1,200 vessels were handled covering 50,000 tons of cargo, and liberty parties comprising some 19,000 persons from visiting ships. Eleanor Roosevelt was among the VIPs who visited Bora Bora in August 1943.

It was also in 1943 that the US High Command realised that the war was passing Bobcat by and there was no longer any need for so many soldiers to defend the base. The number of Army troops was reduced in stages from some 4,000 to 1,000. With the completion of the airport, the seaplane squadron was no longer needed so VS-52 was withdrawn in June 1943. The 1st Construction Battalion was withdrawn in September. Navy personnel were reduced from 47 officers/700 men to 22 officers/400 men.

A refuelling wharf had been needed since June 1942 for, while the cruiser moorings worked well, the process was slow and much manpower was required. It was decided in 1944, that with the draw down of personnel, a more efficient means of refuelling was needed. The final construction project on Bobcat was the building of a refuelling wharf on the north shore of Faanui Bay. It was completed in October 1944.

The reduction of Bobcat personnel was an ongoing process. In November 1944, the remaining Army personnel left, leaving only 125 Navy personnel. In May 1945, these were further reduced to four officers and 46 enlisted. By now, fewer and fewer ships were using Bobcat's facilities (averaging one per week).

While Bobcat was used less and less, as the end of the war in the Pacific was approaching, the base was considered important enough to leave open until after VJ-Day. Finally on June 2, 1946, Bora Bora Naval Station was disestablished and the remaining facilities were turned over to the French Colonial authorities.

Bora Bora returned to being a quiet, remote island. The large oil tanks were removed by the French and taken to Tahiti. Parts of the water system were also dismantled and taken to other islands

It was in the late 1950s that Bora Bora's airfield assumed an importance it had never had during the war as the airport at Motu Mute was then the only operational one in all of French Polynesia. In 1958, Compagnie de Transport Aériens Intercontintentaux (TAI of Paris) extended their Paris-Saigon-Noumea (New Caledonia) air route to include a stop in Bora Bora. Passengers would begin the flight in a Douglas DC-6 airliner and upon their arrival in Bora Bora, disembark and get on a Consolidated PBY-5A Catalina flying boat to continue their trip to Papeete (on Tahiti) where they would land in the bay. However, since the French built Faaa Airport in Papeete in 1961, Bora Bora has been used only for inter-island travel.

I have visited Bora Bora four times in between January 1991 and July 1997 and on each trip I learned more about Operation 'Bobcat'. There are several obvious reminders of the US occupation beginning with the 20-mile road circling the island and the airport. The latter remains basically the same as when it was constructed in 1943 but only the long runway is used and maintained today. The passengers who arrive at the airport are shuttled to the island by boat to the dock in Vaitape, the same one built by the Americans. The large US dock on the south side of Faanui Bay is in daily use for cargo, while on the north side of the bay, the remains of the refuelling dock can be seen.

Also, along the road, on the north side of Faanui Bay, can be seen a large ammunition bunker. There are five more of these bunkers on the island: three in Faanui Valley, and two in Povai Valley. They are quite impressive structures. The bunker at the end of Faanui Valley is the easiest to visit as the rest are on private property, and the doors are often locked.

All along the eastern side of the island are hundreds of concrete pads, many visible from the road. At the peak of the US occupation, there were over 800 Quonset huts on the island. The huts were removed by the military when they closed down Bobcat, but the concrete pads stayed and many of the natives have constructed their houses on these ready-made building platforms.

The seaplane ramp is still visible at Tupua alongside the road. The remains of a small concrete wall that formed part of the aircraft hangar can also be seen.

There are two anchors and a 7-inch gun that can be seen from the road in Povai. The anchors were removed from the bay and formed part of one of the cruiser moorings and the gun was removed from Point Tereia. Some 20 years ago, all three items were placed in the back yard of a native who was planning to create a museum, but this has not materialised.

Of the eight guns on the island, all save the one now on display at Povai are still on their original sites. Those at Point Matira, Pahua and Tereia can all be reached following a 10-15 minute hike up those hills. In places, remains of the roads made to mount the guns can still be seen. Each site has two small ammunition bunkers located nearby and a square, concrete command post located halfway between. They are all exactly the same in size and construction. The best gunsite to visit is Point Pahua, the one defending the entrance to the lagoon. This has good views of the lagoon and the town of Vaitape. The places and dates of manufacture and serial numbers are still legible on the breeches of all of the guns, the manufacturing dates varying from 1906-08.

The easiest site to visit is Point Tuahora but there is a catch. The road to it runs past a rubbish dump, and after passing through a cloud of smoke from burning trash, and parking at the base of the hill, the visitor is greeted by swarms of flies. The guns here still have legible range markings.

Point Matira's guns are overgrown with foliage so there is no view, but they are still interesting to visit. Point Tereia's site is probably the least worth the effort as there is only one gun remaining, the other having been moved with only the mounting remaining.

There are several tour companies on Bora Bora which give excursions around the island. One of them is equipped with four-wheel-drive vehicles and takes tourists to the Point Pahua gun-site.

Bora Bora is a very pleasant place to visit and there are now some 800 hotel rooms on the island. Tourism is the major industry in French Polynesia and the government has passed new tax regulations that promote investment in tourism-related projects. Nevertheless, no matter how many changes occur, the beauty of the island will always remain and it will always hold a special place in the history of the US overseas operations of WWII.

In closing, I would like to thank my wife Deb for helping me to write this article and for putting up with my obsession with Bora Bora for the last six years. I would also like to thank Bora Bora residents Alfredo Doom and Nir Shalev for their help with my research.

There are six large ammunition bunkers surviving on Bora Bora: one along the road at Faanui *(above)*, three in Faanui Valley and two in Povai Valley. All are exactly the same, built like a large Quonset hut with several feet of dirt covering on top and measuring 20ft wide by 50ft deep with a ceiling 10ft high. The natives still use the bunkers as shelter when a hurricane threatens the island, which occurs about once every ten years.